Like A Phoenix From The Ashes
Prologue

The summons to the Headmaster’s office was unusual, to say the least, considering it was the winter holidays. Perhaps he wants to wish me a pleasant holiday or something, Harry snorted.

He neared the gargoyle, which slid aside as he approached it, so he took the exposed stairs to the door to the headmaster’s office, which was surprisingly open. Upon entering, he was even more surprised to find Pansy Parkinson and two people that he assumed were her parents in the office. “Headmaster. Pansy,” he said, nodding.

“You surprise me, Po … I’m sorry, habits die hard. Harry. Given that we haven’t been the best of friends these past five and a half years, that was far more civil than I deserve.”

Albus Dumbledore entered the conversation at this point. “Harry, may I introduce Miss Parkinson’s parents? These are Alonso and Aldonza Parkinson.”

“Don and Doña Parkinson, I am pleased to make your acquaintance.” He bowed over the offered hand from Pansy’s mother.

“Quite well read a young man, I see,” Mister Parkinson said in a quintessentially upper class British voice.

“When all you can do over a summer besides chores is read the books your cousin doesn’t want to, you learn a lot. I’m surprised you didn’t name your daughter Dulcinea.”

Aldonza laughed. “We thought about it,” she said, a hint of Spanish to her words, “but we decided that honouring one of my friends would be a better thing. I knew your mother, Mister Potter. She stood by us when we scandalized the school by dating.” She grinned. “Check the Gryffindor rolls for the years that your mother was here.”

“Be that as it may be,” Pansy said, interjecting herself back into the conversation, “we need to talk to you, Harry.”

“About what?” he asked warily.

“I may be Slytherin, but the Hat almost put me in Ravenclaw. Let me tell you what I’ve come up with, and then show you something. Since coming to this school in nineteen ninety one, you have had problems four of those five years with some git who didn’t have the good graces to die almost sixteen years ago.” She held up her hand, holding one finger up. “First year, Professor Quirrell hosts Voldemort. You deal with him.” She ticked her second finger into the air, making a V with them. “Second year, that stupid diary that everyone knows Lucius Malfoy gave to Ginny Weasley but no one can prove it – you fight Voldemort again, or at least a memory of him. And win. Again.” Up came another finger to make a W. “Third year was Sirius Black, but we’ll ignore that year for now, since he had nothing to do with Voldemort. Fourth year was the infamous Tri-Wizard Tournament where the fake Professor Moody slipped your name into the Goblet. I’m sorry for the ‘Potter Stinks’ badges, by the way.” Harry nodded, and motioned that she continue. “The whole year goes on, and you return carrying Cedric’s body. Despite the fact that it was bloody obvious that he was killed with an Avada Kedavara, and that your wand hadn’t been the one to cast it, since you weren’t in Azkaban shortly thereafter, the Ministry, in its infinite stupidity, decrees that Voldemort isn’t back, and that you’re just an insane student for saying that he is.” Up came her fourth finger, leaving only her thumb folded across her palm. “Last year, when this man, in his infinite wisdom,” she said, pointing at Dumbledore, “deemed it necessary to abandon you to the good graces of the Head of my House.” She turned to Dumbledore. “I may be a student, sir, but I’d really like to know the logic you were using. But that’s for later.” She looked back to Harry. “We had Delores Umbridge (a more worthless waste of space I have never met), who had unbelievable fun destroying the morale of the student body.”

“You were part of her Inquisitorial Squad,” Harry pointed out acidly.

“True. I’ve also been Draco Malfoy’s sycophant. It’s called survival, Harry. The Hat insisted I’d do better in Slytherin, so there I went. We’ve been purebloods for a long time, and I’ve been pretty sure that Lucius Malfoy was going to make a concerted effort to join our fortunes together. Hence, I need to be nice to the … ahem … person who can make my life hell.” She laughed. “Especially if he knew I’ve been lying to him these past five and a half years.” She pulled out her wand and cast a spell, and her features changed. She was still quite obviously Pansy Parkinson ...

“Where do you come into this?” Harry asked her parents.

In response, they bared their left arms showing them to be clear. “We’re being pressured by Lucius Malfoy to take the mark, or else something could happen.” Alonso grumbled. “Bastard couldn’t stay in Azkaban where he belongs, could he?” He looked Harry in the eyes. “We need protection. Our household is safe, by and large. We’ve moved all the things we truly don’t want to lose into our Gringott’s vault. If Voldemort and his sycophants manage to bring down the house, then we lose a fine mansion, but nothing we’d truly mourn. But we don’t want to be there if they bring it down.”

Aldonza picked up. “And our daughter suggested we talk to you. If a student at Hogwarts is able to escape someone reputed to be the most powerful dark wizard of this age – well, to be honest, we want to be on that wizard’s good side.”
"I know how..."

"The Sorting Hat wanted me there," he said simply. "I'd met Draco first, though, so you can imagine how I felt about being in his house."

"Are you sure you're not a Slytherin, Harry?" Pansy said with an admiring smile. "That was brilliant!"

"Magic is a funny thing, Harry. I'm betting that when he tried to kill you in eighty-one, he actually forged a connection with you. I'd bet all the money I own that he's now set things so that only you can kill him permanently. If he had a brain in his head, he'd realize that, and run very far away from you."

Harry met Dumbledore's eyes, and was interested to see that the man's eyebrows were threatening to climb into his hairline. Harry turned back to the three Parkinsons and spoke. "The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other, for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..." He met their eyes. "That was what Moldieshorts was after at the end of last year. You were right, Pansy."

Alonso looked at Dumbledore. "What sort of training has the boy – I apologize, Harry – has Harry received to fight Voldemort?"

"Nearly none," Harry interrupted. "Occlumency with a teacher who hates me, and extra-curricular spell study in third year with the only effective Defence teacher we've ever had. Beyond that, anything I've learned has been with the help of Hermione Granger."

"Is this true?" Alonso asked of the headmaster.

"One of many mistakes I have made in these last years. I had wished him to have as normal a childhood as possible." Harry muttered something below the level of hearing of everyone in the room except for Fawkes, apparently, who flew over and landed on his shoulder.

"Then he has at least been protected during the summers when he not at school?" Aldonza asked.

"Of course," Dumbledore responded with some asperity, while Harry snorted.

"Explain, please," Alonso requested, so Harry carefully described his life with the Dursleys. Everyone in the room was horrified except for Harry. When he was done, Pansy surprised everyone by grinning. "Are you insane, daughter?" Aldonza asked. "You are happy at his treatment?"

"Don't be ridiculous, mother," Pansy snapped back. "Think about it, however. What he grew up with should have turned him into someone even worse than Voldemort. Instead, he's a kind, gentle man with a heart bigger than those who had normal lives have. I've been his enemy for five and a half years, and I already know that he's at least contemplating helping us." She laughed once. "And he's fought Voldemort four times and remained alive, and that's with no training from the very people who should want him to win. We've made the right decision throwing our fortunes along with his, mother. He'll win – of that I have no doubt now."

"That makes one of us," Harry muttered.

"We've decided to join our fortunes with yours, Harry. Our daughter believes in you, and she knows of you far better than I do. Our question now is how we go about protecting ourselves."

Harry closed his eyes for a moment, obviously lost in thought. When he opened them again, he obviously had a plan in mind. "Do you mind living on the outskirts of a Muggle town, out in the middle of nowhere?"

"We have some dealings with Muggles," Alonso replied. "I work behind the scenes more than anything else, but I am not one of the Purebloods who detests anything Muggle. I own many businesses that straddle the line between the worlds. Do you think wizards make all the cauldrons that you students and we adults use for our potions? Who grows the food that we eat? The interface is rarely seen, but is there, and both worlds would be poorer in many ways without that interface, the least of which is monetarily."

Harry nodded. "There is a house in a town called Godric's Hollow. You move there in the dark of night some night, and live there until it's safe."

"Harry," Dumbledore warned, but Harry interrupted.

"Pansy is known to be my enemy, Professor. She's one of those eeee-vil Slytherins, remember? Why would Harry Potter give his enemy's parents a house to live in? Besides, it's mine, or will completely officially be mine on this upcoming July thirty-first."

He turned to Pansy. "Our next problem is you. We need to get to know each other better, obviously. You were caught, somehow, concerning one of the pranks Draco pulled these last few months. Rather than incur the wrath of your House, you took all the blame, as a good little sycophant should." He grinned as he saw her eyes light up – she knew where he was going with this. "In sentencing you, rather than take points, you and I have been forced to study together. Some half-baked notion about House unity. We will work Potions together, study together, and even eat meals together. Others may join us if they choose, but I am forced to work with you until at least the end of the year. We can actually become friends that way, and you can play it off Draco as getting inside information."

"Are you sure you're not a Slytherin, Harry?" Pansy said with an admiring smile. "That was brilliant!"

"The Sorting Hat wanted me there," he said simply. "I'd met Draco first, though, so you can imagine how I felt about being in his house."

"I know how I feel about being in his house. Pardon the language, but just be glad you're not his bitch." She growled. "And I mean that in a
breeding sense. He expects to marry me because our family is wealthier than Daphne's." She looked at him again. "Let's put it this way, Harry. I would rather marry Ron Weasley, knowing that he hates me and that it would always be a loveless marriage, than to marry Draco Malfoy."

"Not likely on that," Harry snorted. "Ron's shagging Hermione Granger, and has been since the summer."

"Does that bother you, Harry?" Dumbledore asked, his voice carrying his worry easily.

"Them dating? No. She made her choice, and now I can contemplate Ginny. Them lying to me since July about not having a relationship? I expect that Ron has been able to convince Hermione that it would make me feel left out if two of the Golden Trio started dating. Their lying bothers me. And I have no intention on letting them know that I know."

"How did you find out?" Pansy asked.

"Ginny told me that they were dating. She also accidentally discovered that they had gotten intimate. Stumbled across them without them ever knowing." He laughed. "She told me she was going to scrub her eyeballs after seeing her brother naked." He looked skyward. "Come to think of it, I room with the guy. I think I'd be the same way," he laughed.

He turned to Pansy. "I won't lie to you, Pansy. I'm going to be watching you. But this is either a plan on Voldemort's part that shows far better planning than he's used in the past five years, or the truth. This could destroy you if this goes wrong."

"I'd know you were lying if you said you trusted me, Harry. I've spent five years being a thorn in your side."

He smiled and held out his hand. "Hi. Harry Potter. Pleased to meet you."

She grinned in response and took the proffered hand. "Pansy Parkinson. Pleased to meet you as well."
Like A Phoenix From The Ashes
Chapter 1

Harry disengaged his lips from Ginny Weasley's neck to a disappointed noise from her. "Why'd you stop, Harry?" she moaned quietly.

"Because we're down in the drawing room, where anyone can walk in on us. I have every intention, beautiful, of giving you your birthday present tonight. Several times, if I can manage it. But I'm not going to do it down where anyone can walk in on us."

Ginny was trying valiantly to poke through the blouse she was wearing. "Several times?" she breathed in awe.

"If I'm up to it. And inspired enough." He waggled his eyebrows at her. "And trust me, you're inspiring." He took her hand and gently brushed it along his jeans, and her eyes widened.

"I'm doing that to you?" she asked.

"Have for months, sexy." He leaned forward and whispered in her ear. "You were wank material for me all sixth year. Dreaming about what we're going to do tonight."

She looked up at the clock, which announced that it was ten PM. "How about now?" she breathed. "I'll tell Mum I'm going to bed, and go in to let Hermione know what's happening. After I leave, she'll undoubtedly go grab Ron, and they'll be doing the same thing." She paused. "Have they ever admitted it to you?"

"Nope. Been a year that they think I don't know about their relationship. I figure that if I haven't been told before we end our seventh year, I'll ask 'em flat out when the wedding is. That should be good for a laugh or two."

"I'd think you'd be angrier."

"Oh, I'm pretty chuffed about the lying, but as for the relationship? Well, if I were with Hermione, then I'd never have realized just what I'd been ignoring these past years. So in a toss-up between a pretty and sexy bookworm, and a woman who makes my heart stop when she smiles, who makes me realize just how damned lucky I am for her to even deign to notice me as more than the dirt beneath her feet, which I am, well, I choose you. The fact that you're just as smart as Hermione in your own ways doesn't hurt. I find brains to be sexy, gorgeous."

"I'm not a woman yet, Harry," she said quietly in a voice that tested Harry's resolve, as well as the tensile strength of his zipper.

"Well, let's get upstairs and take care of that detail then, shall we?" He stood, offered his hands to her and helped her to her feet. She took the chance to hold him close, and he could feel his erection throbbing against her. When they broke, they quickly did what they could to hide their responses to each other, what with both having noticeably pointed reactions to each other. Harry sped upstairs and prepared his bedroom for her – soft comforter, silk sheets, and gentle music playing softly.

A few minutes later, he heard the door open and close quickly, and a sudden gasp. He turned to face his diminutive love, and saw tears in her eyes. "What?" he asked, alarmed. "What did I do wrong?"

"Nothing," she sniffed. "You did everything just perfectly." She put her arms around him. "Have I told you that I love you, Harry Potter?"

"Yes, but I still like to hear it. Have I told you recently that you are my entire life, and that I'm dangerously close to proposing to you?"

She gasped. "If you do, then my answer is yes, Harry."

"Let's wait until school is out, beautiful," he said. "I expect you'll be swept off your feet by Neville before my seventh year is over," he added, melodramatically laying a hand across his forehead. "Seriously – let me get a certain other thing out of the way first, okay?" She nodded, and then undid the tie on her bathrobe. Letting it slide off her shoulders, she exposed the nightgown she wore beneath.

Harry's breathing stopped, but his heart rate doubled. She was wearing a translucent white silk nightgown that hugged her body in a way that he could only dream of doing. Ignoring the fact that they were quite hard beneath the fabric, he could see the dark circles of her nipples, and as his eye slid lower, a faint red triangle between her legs.

"Do you like it, Harry?" she asked shyly. When he didn't respond for several seconds, her face fell, and she bent to pick up the robe.

"No!" he exclaimed. "I'm sorry, but I just ... I suddenly realized that I had an angel in front of me, and I was stunned. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Ginny. You ... how do I make you understand how ... damn, I don't even have the words to tell you how incredible you look. You really do look like an angel, my love. A very sexy one, but an angel nonetheless." He paused before adding, "Add a couple more 'very' in that." He gently put his hands on her shoulders. "Are you sure that you want to give something so amazingly precious to an uncouth savage, namely me?"

"Yes, Harry. I've wanted to give you this since I first understood why looking at you in your Quidditch gear made me tingle interestingly."

"It's your birthday. Why am I the one getting the present?" he asked with a smile.

"Because you'll give me the present I've wanted for so long after you unwrap your present."

He brought his hands up to the straps on her shoulders and gently pulled them off slowly, watching her to see if she wanted him to stop. Moments later, the straps slid down her arms, and soon her breasts were exposed to him, and moments later, the rest of her nude body was before him.
resisted as she tried to get him to move. "Not … yet … you … first …"

He smiled and continued to slide slowly into her, and she gasped as she felt herself stretching farther than she thought she'd have been able to take.

"If I do it right, love," he murmured, and grabbed his wand to cast a very powerful Silencio on the room. His face came forward, and he pressed a kiss to her lower lips, which were quite wet. He let his tongue slide out, grinning as he realized that she never knew one thing about him. It had never connected with any of the girls that Harry was one of the only males in the school who could lick whipped cream of the end of his nose—easily. His tongue darted deeply inside his lover, causing a gasp that may as well have been classified as a scream.

He continued to tease and torture Ginny with his tongue, occasionally pulling out and locating the taut little nub that would make her grip the sheets whenever he merely touched it. She began to make an odd rhythmic grunt as his ministrations continued, one that sped up the longer he thrust his tongue into her. Finally, he felt her thighs tighten, and she lifted herself from the bed as she began to buck. Harry grinned and redoubled his efforts for just another moment, until she finally gasped, "Harry – stop!

"Please Harry, if you think it will bring me pleasure, I’ll try it."

"The girl who taught you how to do that. That wasn’t the first time you’ve done that to a girl. There’s no way that could have been your first."

"You’re wrong. You’re the first time for me, Ginny. First time for that, first time for everything."

"Wow," she breathed. Finally, she looked at him with a look that made him twitch. "Harry, I don’t want your face down there anymore. I’d rather have something else there, if you don’t mind."

He smiled and slid up her body, drawing delicious shivers from her, especially when he teased her navel again. Finally, he was at her face, and the tip of his erection tickled at her opening. "Has anyone told you that you’re huge, Harry?" she giggled.

"No one’s ever gotten as good a look at me as you, Ginny," he said, kissing her.

"So that’s what I taste like," she murmured. "Odd, but not exactly unpleasant."

He reached over and grabbed his holly wand, and whispered "Contraceptus." She gasped at the spell.

"That spell can get you ready for love-making," Ginny murmured. "That has to be the second most erotic tingle you’ve ever caused in me."

"Stop and face a lifetime of carnivorous Bat Bogey Hexes," she replied with a smile.

"Your slightest wish, my lady, is my most urgent command," he whispered, and continued to gently push into her, pulling out slightly to improve lubrication. He could feel her heartbeat pulsing against his length, and he could feel his own heartbeat throbbing inside her. As their pelvises touched, he sighed in deep contentment, which she echoed with a very erotic moan. He felt quite close to the edge of his own orgasm, so he resisted as she tried to get him to move. "Not … yet … you … first …"
Her eyes widened at that. "Harry," she panted, "... already have. Your turn ... please?"

The look in her eyes and the tone of her voice made him lose all pretence of control. "As my lady commands," he murmured, having calmed enough to utter a complete sentence, and began a slow pull out of her. As he was almost completely out, he changed direction and slid back inside her completely. He repeated this, picking up speed with each thrust. Before he had finished his tenth stroke, she was quivering against him, lost in another orgasm, and this drove him over the edge. He pressed as tightly against her as he could, spilling his seed and his very soul into her.

He regained his senses a short time later to find her beneath him, cooing. He blinked at her, and then rolled gently onto his side, Ginny rolling with him to keep his still semi-erect organ inside her. She nestled tightly against him, and finally breathed "Thank you" to him.

"Trust me, Ginny, it was my pleasure," he laughed softly.

"I can tell. Your 'pleasure' is still throbbing inside me."

He held her tightly. "Oh my God, Ginny – I can't tell you enough how much I love you. That you trusted me with something so ... so wonderful as your first time – it means more than I can say."

"It went to the man I wanted to have it, Harry. I wanted you to make me a woman." She kissed his neck, and then pulled back from him slightly. "I love you, Harry." A sparkle entered her eyes, she bent her head and ran her tongue over one of his nipples. He felt himself start to harden inside her again. "Ooo, looks like you want time number two," she purred at him, pushing him so that he was on his back, her straddling him as to not lose him. He sat up and ran her fingers down his chest, making him shiver. "Giddyup, horsie," she moaned as he pulsed inside her.

It was nearing two o’clock when they decided that they should get at least a little sleep. After five distinct orgasms on Harry's part, he was tired, especially since the most recent had been when they had gotten adventurous in the water closet, and he had her hold the sink tightly while he picked her hips up and took her from behind. She had not been able to touch the floor, and the orgasm that had torn through her had made them both glad that he had cast silencing charms.

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Charlie Weasley met his brother Bill in the kitchen at Number 12 Grimmauld Place. "So we gather Harry and get him his books today, right?" Bill asked him, not quite awake.

"Yes, Bill," Charlie laughed. "Plus we have that conversation with him about Ginny and respecting her. Put a little fear of Weasley into him if necessary." He cocked an eyebrow at his older brother. "Why are you so tired?"

"You know Fleur and I – well, she wants to get married, but by Veela tradition, she won’t marry until she proves she is fertile. In other words, we’re trying for a baby."

"Mum’s not gonna be happy about that. You know her attitudes on premarital …"

"Fleur sat her down and explained to her. Mum had tears in her eyes by the end, and the wedding is basically all planned, except for the actual wedding date. As soon as Fleur tells Mum, the invites go out for roughly seven to ten days later. Anyway, we really want to get married …" Bill continued.

"No! No more! We’re reaching the Too Much Information point!" Charlie laughed. "While you inhale some more coffee, I’ll go get Harry moving."

He stood and headed up the stairs to the master bedroom, where Harry now slept.

As he approached the door, he noticed that it was unusually quiet. He cast a quick spell and saw that the door was magically locked and sound-proofed. Curious, he cast another spell he’d been taught by Bill – a very useful one for a curse-breaker. The door faded to look as glass from Charlie’s perspective, but he knew that it was still a door from within the room. What he saw made his eyes widen, and he tightened his fists so hard that he knew his knuckles were white.

Inside, Harry was kneeling on the bed behind a very naked Ginny, who was face down on the mattress, her face toward the door. He was thrusting forcefully into Ginny, who was apparently gasping with each thrust. Charlie’s rage didn’t let him see the look of sheer bliss on Ginny’s face. Suddenly, Harry’s thrusting stopped, and he was rather obviously orgasming. Finally spent, he collapsed to the side.

Charlie dropped the spell and stalked downstairs. He kept clenching and unclenching his fists, and didn’t stop until he’d reached the kitchen. He cast a Silencio at Bill’s puzzled look, and began to let loose with a string of curses that threatened to make the paint peel.

"What in the hell brought that on?" Bill asked when he was able to get a word in edgewise.

"Harry, upstairs, with Ginny. Doing what made you so tired this morning."

"What!" Bill bellowed as he shot to his feet. "Stop him!

"He had already finished when I came back from being so shocked. I think you need to go up and get him, while I get my temper under control. We’ll have that talk with him still, but I think it’s going to be literal threats, rather than assumed ones."

"All right," Bill said. "I'll go up and knock on the door, and alert him. Ginny's going to want to pretend she wasn't in there. I say we let her keep the fiction for now. Maybe later we'll pull her aside and explain."

"You know she's got a temper like Mum's," Charlie said.
And she’s still young enough to be put over my knee if it gets out of hand. You stay and calm; I’ll go get Casanova.” Bill walked up the stairs slowly, reaching the door finally and realizing that Charlie had left the spell on the door. Harry was just reappearing in the room, dressed in a robe, which he dropped as he called a towel to himself and headed to the shower. Bill knocked, and Harry spun. His mouth moved, and then he frowned. Grabbing his wand, he said something, and then spoke again.

“Who is it?”

“Bill. You ready to go out for your books?”

A snort was the immediate response. “Overslept. Gimme a few minutes for a quick shower, and I’ll meet you downstairs. Fifteen minutes sound good?”

“We’re dragging you to Diagon Alley naked if you go over that,” Bill said, forcing a laugh into his voice.

“Good God, no!” Harry laughed in response. “The Prophet would have a field day with that! Be down in fifteen!” He walked into the shower.

Bill cancelled the spell on the door and headed back downstairs. “He’ll be down in fifteen minutes at most. We get to talk with him after that.”

Shopping was actually fairly taking only about three hours, considering some of the lines Harry had to deal with as far as school supplies were concerned. Since Harry could now do magic legally, most things he carried in his pockets after shrinking them. At one point, both Weasleys looked a bit alarmed and told him to stay in the store he was in (Flourish and Blotts) while they dealt with something quickly. He watched them disappear, and slid next door to the jeweller’s store, where he purchased a simple white gold ring with a single ruby, and then slid back into the bookstore. Charlie and Bill came back shortly after, looking much relieved. “Done for the day, Harry?” Charlie asked.

“Yeah. I guess all we need to do now is to head back.” They began the walk back up the street toward the Leaky Cauldron.

“Let’s stop and have a drink first, Harry,” Bill said. “You’re an adult now.”

Harry’s attention wasn’t on Bill, though. Over against a wall, he could see a girl crying. There was an owl sitting near her, acting slightly worried. He approached her, and discovered that it was Pansy Parkinson. “Hey, what’s wrong?” he asked, the concern evident in his voice.

Her response was to throw her arms around him and cry outright. After a few minutes of sobbing, he finally got her calmed enough to tell him the problem. She handed him the letter, which said that her mother’s father had died during the night. “I loved Pappy,” she sniffed. “I never really told him that.”

“He knew it, Pansy,” Harry said soothingly. “Tell you what – come with me to The Leaky Cauldron. You need a shoulder to cry on right now.”

“I can’t – Mum will be along any second to get me. Thank you, though.” She sniffed again. Just then, a Pop! sounded behind Harry, and Charlie and Bill were aiming with their wands.

Without looking, Harry said, “My sympathies, Aldonza.”

“Thank you, Harry. That means a lot. Come Pansy, we must go,” the unshed tears evident in her voice.

Before she headed over, Harry kissed Pansy’s forehead. “It gets better eventually. If you need to talk to me, you know how.” He pulled her into another hug, and then the two ladies Disapparated.

The three males continued their way to The Leaky Cauldron before speaking again. They paid for a small private room, where they each sat with a glass of butterbeer. Bill looked at the clock and said, “Hell, it’s after noon, and we’re all men here, right?” He asked for a bottle of Ogden’s Firewhiskey and three glasses.

After Harry had successfully shot blue flames from his nose after downing a shot (although it hadn’t been his intention to breathe flame), Charlie looked at him with extreme seriousness. “Harry, what’s with being so friendly to a Slytherin? Don’t you realize that she’s a Malfoy toady?”

“I know a bit more about her than you do, thank you very much,” he said with some annoyance. “I’ll thank you not to tell me who my friends should be.”

“You call a Slytherin a friend? Are you insane? You can’t trust a Slytherin as far as you can throw Hogwarts!”

“Dumbledore seems to think otherwise. Look at Snape. I was sentenced, last Christmas, to hang out with her in all my classes, to study with her, and generally to be around her. She’d been involved in one of the nastier Malfoy pranks, and decided to take the fall for it, possibly to save her own life. Dumbledore decided that we should get to know each other better, and oddly enough, this time he was right. I consider her a friend now.”

“Yeah, a kissing friend. That brings us to something else.” Charlie’s face went dark. “We know for a fact that you and Ginny have gone beyond merely kissing, Harry. It stops now.”

Harry’s own face went blank. “Or else?” he asked coldly.

“Or else we end it for you, Harry. Our sister is too young. She’s only sixteen.”

“Which is the legal age of consent in Muggle England.”
"She's not a Muggle," Bill added darkly. "It stops now."

"How does she feel about this? Have you asked her? Or doesn't she get a say in it? Have you already picked out the man you'll let her marry?"

"It sure the fuck won't be a kid who's only going to get her killed," Charlie growled.

Harry's face went white. "All the names that are coming to mind right now would insult your mother, and I like her too much. I'm leaving, and I'll thank you to stay out of our love life."

"Or else?" Charlie asked mockingly.

"You know damned well what 'Or else' means, Charlie," Harry growled. "No one hurts Ginny and gets away with it. And what you're trying to do will hurt her."

"It's for her own safety," Charlie growled in response.

Harry's answer was to get up and walk to the fireplace. As he reached for the Floo powder, he felt a painful blow to the back of his head, and then nothing.
He awoke with a pounding headache, in a strange room. After a moment of grooping for his glasses, he found them and put them on, to discover that he was in a hospital room. **Hmm, not the school, so this must be St. Mungo’s. What the hell hit me during the argument? They wouldn’t have struck me from behind, would they?**

A healer came in shortly, carrying a small case filled with vials. "How are we feeling today, Mister Potter?” she chirped.

He blinked for a moment. "Well, I can’t speak for you, but my head feels like someone tried to cave it in with a chair or something.”

She lost her smile and said, “That’s pretty accurate, from what I hear. There was something of a brawl in The Leaky Cauldron, and you were struck with a chair. Bill and Charlie Weasley rushed you here as soon as they could.” She sighed. “I shouldn’t, but do you know if Charlie Weasley is seeing anyone?”

The memory of everything up to the chair impacting with his head came back to him far more solidly than it had upon his awakening. "For whatever girl’s sake, I sure hope not,” Harry muttered.

The healer raised her eyebrows, but said nothing else. "How long have I been in here?” he asked her finally.

"Today’s the fifteenth of August,” she replied. “You came in on the twelfth. That was an ugly head injury. To be honest, we were worrying whether you’d come out of that coma.”

“Well, I am. Any idea when I’ll be getting out of here?”

“Probably before the week is out. We just want to make sure that you’re all right.”

“I understand. Anyone actually willing to visit me out there?”

“The Weasley family are out there, as well as a friend or two from Hogwarts, as I understand it.” She placed three vials on the table next to his bed. "I want you to drink these two potions, and then after your visits are over, this one.” She handed him the first of the vials, which he downed quickly, and repeated the performance for the second one. “That should speed your healing.” She exited the room.

The first to enter the room was Ginny, and she looked as if she had left furious several stages behind her. She stalked to the bed and punched him in the jaw. "Come near me again, Potter, and I’ll … I’ll make you wish I was going to kill you.” She spun and left the room in tears.

He was blinking and rather stunned, and not just from the impact of her fist against his jaw. He was still trying to figure out what had happened when Bill and Charlie entered the room. "Ginny’s got quite the right hook, wouldn’t you say, Bill?”

"So, what sort of lies did you feed her?” Harry snarled.

"None, really. We told her about you running into Pansy in Diagon Alley, and how you hugged her, and kissed her. How she chose to believe our meaning is beyond our control,” Charlie said mock-angelically.

"Sneaky. Tell the truth such that it’s true, but still a lie at the same time. I’d imagine you very carefully aimed the conversation to get her thinking along those lines before telling her, and were very careful not to tell her that the hug was merely a friendly one, and that the kiss was on the forehead?”

"Not our fault if we were never able to tell anyone that information,” Charlie replied smugly.

Harry stared at him for a long time. "Remember one thing, Charles. You too, William. Revenge is a dish best served cold, it’s been said. Your mistake is leaving me alive. **I will** get revenge for what you’ve done.”

Charlie snorted. "This is supposed to frighten me?”

"It should,” Harry said coldly. "You’ve heard the prophecy about me when I told it to the Order. Now, either you believe I have what it takes to defeat one of the most powerful wizards in a generation, or you should be on the run, preferably to the United States. You’re still here. That means that you think I have what it takes. I was hoping to do it with my future fiancée by my side, but you two scotched that quite handily.”

“What?” Bill asked in shock.

"I told her last night, **before anything happened**, that if she still loved me when she left Hogwarts, I’d ask her to marry me.” He looked at Charlie. "Thank you,” he snarled. "Now get the fuck out of my room.”

"And how do you expect to enforce that?” Charlie mocked.

In answer, Harry stared at him, and suddenly thrust his hands outward. The door opened, and the two of them literally flew from the room, landing a few moments later with a loud crash, which was quickly followed by groans.

Ron popped his head in the room, his face red with rage. "First you break Ginny's heart, and now my brothers' legs?” He leapt into the room, obviously aiming to do further injury to Harry, but slammed into an invisible wall. "Coward!” Ron yelled as he banged on the wall. Harry simply threw...
his hands out again, and Ron joined his brothers in the hallway. He swung his hand, and the door slammed shut.

It opened a few moments later to show Hermione looking warily into the room. "Come to punch, or slap, or simply taunt me, Hermione? Everyone else has."

"You know me better than that, Harry," she said, walking over and sitting on the edge of the bed. "Oh, nasty bruise she left." She pulled her wand and quickly healed the mark Ginny had left. "I am seventeen, after all," she said with a smile.

"So why aren't you screaming your head off at me? The way Bill and Charlie are gloating, they've apparently got Ginny thinking that I shagged Pansy Parkinson in Diagon Alley."

"Well, you have to admit that the ring is sort of a dead give-away that something is going on between you two," Hermione said quietly. "Why couldn't you admit it to any of us?"

Harry went white. "What sort of ring are we talking about?"

"A white gold ring with a single ruby set in it. The box was labelled 'To my Pretty little Pansy' in your handwriting." She winced. "I recognized it, Harry. It's definitely your handwriting."

"That's the evidence that they used, huh? Along with stringing the conversation to make sure that it sounded like I had a long romantic kiss with her too, right?" Hermione nodded. "One question, Hermione. Do you believe them?"

"I don't know what to believe, Harry. I've known you for six years, but you've changed this last year. You don't seem like the kind of boy who would tell Ginny all the things you said to her last night, and then go out and publicly be romantic with another girl, without warning Ginny that you had to do it for some plan or other." She scowled. "But you're also asking me to believe that her two older brothers can be so cruel, vicious, and heartless as to intentionally destroy their sister's happiness the day after she turned sixteen. I can't honestly believe that they would sit there for three entire days, watching her cry her heart out. They love her too much." She sighed. "But you have never been the type to do what they accuse you of."

"I just don't bloody well know who to believe anymore!"

Harry started at her curse. "Hermione, you know me. You know how highly I value truth – even if I don't always practice it," he said, looking down at his hands.

"I know, Harry. The problem is, you've lied before, when you thought it was important enough to hide what you were doing."

"I know." He looked at her again. "Can I at least convince you to sit on the fence, then? I'll understand not taking either side. I won't push you to take mine."

"I can do that," she said with a wan smile. "Hold off until I have more facts."

"Verify who wrote that box label, for one thing. Don't just judge by the way the handwriting looks. That ring was supposed to be a promise ring for Ginny – promising to marry her if she still wanted me after her seventh year. Despite what Ron thinks, and apparently what your future brother-in-laws think, I don't throw away money on stupid things."

She blinked at him. "What do you mean, 'future …'" she began.

"I'm not stupid. That's a conversation for much later, though." He laughed a humourless laugh. "Go see to your boyfriend. My wandless magic was a bit … strong."

She looked at him in surprise. "This isn't over," she said softly. "We'll talk later, one way or another." She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. "I'm staying on the fence. Even if it costs me my friendship and my boyfriend." She stood and exited the room. Harry could hear the beginnings of questions thrown at Hermione. He shook his head, picked up the vial, and drank it.

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When he awoke again, he opened his eyes to see Professor Dumbledore. "Ah, awake again, I see. How are you feeling, Harry?"

He reached up and rubbed his jaw, finding that someone had healed it in the night. "Much better. Any idea when I'll be permitted to leave?"

"Today, in my care. I will be returning you to your London abode, which currently houses just Dobby and Winky."

"I take it that the Weasley family decided that they would not stay in my house a moment longer than they had to? Get away from the man who broke their daughter's heart?"

"Unfortunately, you are correct. Molly has had several … choice comments to make." Dumbledore shook his head.

"Some family," he grumbled. "Well, they've taught me one lesson I needed to know, at least."

"And what lesson would that be?" the headmaster asked, the worry evident in his voice.

"The Dursleys began the lesson, and the Weasleys completed it, sir. Family is worthless. When you need them there to protect you, do not expect it. When you need them to believe the truth about you, know that they will choose to do otherwise." He looked the headmaster in the eyes. "Yes, the night before Bill and Charlie beat the hell out of me, I did, in fact, have sexual relations with Ginevra Weasley. She has been the only woman I have ever done that with, and quite likely the only woman I ever will have had relations with. To be precise, sir, I was making love to her, and I meant
September first came, finding Harry on the Hogwarts Express heading for his seventh and last year of Hogwarts. As he’d predicted, the majority of Gryffindor students were ignoring him, with one or two notable exceptions. Dean had already informed him that it might be an idea to watch his back, and Neville, of all people, had informed him that he was going to pay for his disrespect of Ginny.

As they appeared in the entryway of 12 Grimmauld, Harry said, “Ought to be interesting in two weeks. You have a Head Boy that one half of your students will ignore. Ron and Ginny are very popular Gryffindors, so their story about how I hurt Ginny, especially with a Slytherin, is going to spread like a wildfire through the tower. I don’t think I need to say anything about the Slytherins, since Draco still runs the show over there. Who knows how the Hufflepuffs and the Ravenclaws will react?” He shrugged. “I predict that Gryffindor will not see the House Cup this year. Might want to let the teachers know that I’m taking book on how quickly I’m kicked from the Gryffindor Quidditch team, too.”

He walked over to the stairs. “Ron always thinks that he gets the short end of the stick. I only wish I had his problems.”

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Currently, sitting in his compartment with him were Luna Lovegood and Hermione Granger. Her relationship with Ron was on the rocks over ‘the Ginny incident’ as everyone seemed to be calling it. Ginny had flat out ended the friendship with Hermione, which had caused Hermione a few tears, but a great deal more anger. “I will laugh in that girl’s face when it’s discovered that her brothers lied to her,” she had growled.

“So you believe me now?” he asked.

“I had a chance to talk to Dumbledore about Head Girl duties, and asked his opinion of this situation. He supports you one hundred percent. I trust Dumbledore.” She cocked her head. “Legilimency?” Harry nodded with a smile. “Thank you,” he said, and then snorted. “Now I just have to find my Hufflepuff supporter amongst the girls.”

Luna and Hermione looked at each other and then started laughing. “Pansy, me, and Luna,” Hermione finally said. “Try Susan. Maybe she’ll believe you.”

A red head popped in the doorway. “Did I hear my name called? Hi, Harry.”

“Hi, Susan,” he replied. “I assume you’ve heard the stories about how evil and horrible I am?”

Susan’s rolling eyes were far more eloquent than any words she could have said. “So, sounds like you’re taking applications for your entourage of girls. Want my resume?” She gave him a dead serious look that was broken only by a quiet twinkle in her eyes.

He looked at her for a moment, and then at the serious looks on the other girls faces, also with eyes twinkling. He started to laugh. “Perfect!” They all cocked their heads at him questioningly. “Well, Susan here is a redhead, Hermione is a brunette, and Luna is blonde. Can anyone tell me Pansy’s hair colour?” He grinned.

They chuckled with him for a moment, and then Susan became serious. “How are you handling things, Harry?”

“Honestly? Like hell. The Weasleys have declared me persona non grata. The woman I gave my heart to, and a good chunk of my soul, has told me that she has every intention of making me wish I was dead if I approach her for anything other than school related things. I’d love to just be able to switch that off, but I can’t. Then I’ve got Ron, who spent all last year lying to me about being together with Hermione.”

“Everyone knew about it,” Susan said. “He tried to tell you that they weren’t?”

“And he convinced me not to say anything to Harry because he thought that Harry might feel like we were abandoning him,” Hermione said softly. “I’m sorry, Harry,” she added.

“Don’t worry about it. I wonder if his real reason for not saying anything is that he feels like he was poaching?”
"Poaching?" Luna asked. "What do you mean?"

I wrote him at the beginning of July and mentioned that I was contemplating asking Hermione out for our first Hogsmeade weekend when we got back to school for sixth year. I got the most amused letter from Ginny the day you got to the Burrow last summer, Hermione."

Hermione's face had gone from surprised to angry. "He … that … oooo …"

"Hermione? You're losing the ability to speak coherently," Harry laughed.

She was red in the face, and it was obviously not from embarrassment. "He came thundering down the stairs, dragged me out into the garden, and professed how much he cared for me — how he fancied me. I was so touched by that. Now I find out he did it to beat you to it?"

"He does fancy you," Harry said. "He wouldn't have done that otherwise. For all I know, he needed my letter to finally get the courage to admit it to you. Don't be angry at him for that."

"I'm finally understanding his comments during the year, though. Whenever I thought it was time to tell you, he'd find a reason not to. And when you started seeing Ginny, he didn't want it mentioned so that it wouldn't hurt Ginny. He was fighting to keep you from knowing."

"Be gentle with him," Harry said.

"No," Hermione said. "I'm going to make him choose. Dumbledore trusts you completely on this issue. I've talked with Pansy, and she echoes your story. That's it. He can either trust someone he's gone to school with these past six years, or he can look for a new girlfriend."

She crossed her arms under her breasts.

"Are you sure about this, Hermione?" Harry asked, worried. "Remember, you're basically asking him to choose between people he's known literally all his life, or this guy who stepped into his life six years ago and proceeded to get him in trouble more times than any of us can count."

"We'll talk about this when I get back from the meeting. I still don't know who the Head Boy is."

"Mind if I walk you to the meeting? It'd be interesting to see who it is." As she stepped past him, he carefully pulled the badge from his pocket and showed the other two girls with a wink. They winked back at him.

In the hallway, she said, "Well, since you're walking me there, I can say what I was going to in the compartment. You let people walk all over you, Harry. He wronged you. Let me repeat that for you. He. Wronged. You. Since you are my friend, I will not stand for that. Until he can find that tiny little brain of his inside that big hollow skull and realize that his brothers lied to the family just to break you and Ginny apart, we are through as a couple."

They reached the compartment, and Hermione opened the door. Ron poked his head out. "Get lost, Potter. This is for prefects and the Head Boy and Girl. I know Hermione's the Head Girl, so she has a reason to be here. I'm a prefect, so I do too. Same with Ginny. You have no reason to be here." He gave Harry a rough shove down the hallway, enough to make him fall back onto his buttocks.

"Ronald Bilius Weasley!" Hermione exclaimed in a shrill voice. Harry simply smiled and stood up. "It's all right, Hermione," Harry said calmly.

"No it's not! If he's going to be an arse …"

"No, really, it's okay. The meeting can't start until the Head Boy is here, now that the Head Girl is here, right?"

"Yes," Hermione said.

"And Mister Weasley here is bound and determined that I not enter the cabin, right?"

"I'll be over my dead body," Ron snarled. "More precisely, over yours."

"Ronald!" Hermione gasped. Ron suddenly discovered exactly why Draco had reacted the way he had in their third year, as blood began to flow from the nose she had just struck.

"I don't care. He has no right to be here, and he's not entering," Ron said through his hand. Ginny, fire in her eyes, came over and healed Ron's nose.

"Get lost, Potter," she hissed. "We all know that the only reason you're here is to cause more trouble." Her eyes flared, and she added. "I'm glad your parents didn't survive to see the right royal bastard you are now."

Harry's eyes went dark. "Hermione, you might as well come away from the room and come back to Luna and Susan. The Head Boy won't be at this meeting."

"How do you know?" she asked, her eyes calculating.

He closed his eyes and a flare of magic put him in his robes. He then reached into his trousers pocket and pulled out the Head Boy badge, then pinned it on his robes. "Because the Head Boy has been forbidden to enter by two of the prefects." He turned and walked back to the cabin that Luna and Susan were still in.
"Short meeting," Susan said.

"Ron and Ginny told me I'd be in the meeting over their dead bodies – actually over my own dead body." He shook his head. "I'll miss him as a friend, but I am really glad that the Head Boy and Girl have their own rooms. Probably something to do with counselling other students. Easier to do in a common room that only two people have access to."

The door slammed open to admit a steaming Ron Weasley, who stalked over to Harry, who stood to meet him. Before anyone could react, Ron lashed out and struck Harry in the chest, just below the throat. Harry felt something crack, and then intense pain went through his head as he impacted with the glass. Not again, he thought idly as his consciousness left him.
Harry awoke in a room that he knew by smell. “You know, I’m getting really tired of this,” he said amiably to the air.

“Ah, Mister Potter, you’re awake,” Madame Pomfrey said. “Excellent. I think this may be a record for you, however – coming to the hospital wing even before the Hogwarts Express gets into the town.”

“How did I get here? And why are my eyes bound?”

There was an uncomfortable silence before she answered. “The Head Boy and Girl and prefect badges have certain spells on them to allow transport to the nearest medical facility. Miss Granger activated yours.”

“Is she here?”

“Yes. She is talking with Professor Dumbledore right now.”

“Why can’t I see? I just realized that my eyes aren’t bound. Is this a permanent condition?”

“You took a strong blow to the occipital area of your skull. That’s where your vision centers are. In essence, they took a shock that made them shut down, temporarily, I hope. Regaining your vision isn’t guaranteed, since your injury aggravated the previous one in the same area, but I honestly will be surprised if you don’t get it all back as good as before. There has been no physical brain damage which might hinder your recovery.”

He snorted. “So I get to go from really blind to merely legally blind,” he laughed. “I trust you, Madame Pomfrey. If I don’t get it back, I know you did what you could.”

“I am pleased to hear you in such a mood, Harry,” the voice of Albus Dumbledore said. “Especially after what happened on the Express.”

Harry shrugged, which reminded him of the pain in his chest. “Ow. He’s got a good punch, I’ll say.” He paused. “Any bets that his Howler will be more along the lines of getting caught, rather than for attacking me? Molly hates me right now.”

“She’ll hate me for breaking up with Ron as well,” Hermione added. “I was going to anyway for lying to you, although I accept the same blame for being a partner to it, but that attack in the meeting car and in your compartment was beyond anything I could even remotely consider justified.” After a brief pause, she added, “I mean that yelling at you might, and I say might have been justified, but the physical attack …”

“I understand, Hermione.” There was an uncomfortable silence again, and suddenly he laughed. “Hey, Hermione? Do you have an escort for the first Hogsmeade weekend?”

“What?” she asked in shock. A few moments later, she began to chuckle. “Let me guess, you’d sworn to ask me if the situation presented itself?”

“Last year, but yeah. Seriously, I could use a friend, and I’m not giving up Hogsmeade because my rather vicious ex-girlfriend won’t go with me. I honestly won’t have many friends this year. You, Pansy, Susan, and Luna are guarantees. Neville and Dean have informed me that I will pay for what I did to Ginny. Seamus will go along with the majority. Ron and Ginny are popular within Gryffindor, so the rest of Gryffindor Tower will be against me, too. Slytherin is a given, especially with our Potions professor.” Harry laughed a dark laugh. “I look forward to the end of the year, after I’m officially finished with school. That slimy little creep has taken points from me for the stupidest things, mainly for being Gryffindor and for being the son of James Potter. I was more adult than him when I started coming to this school. Unless his attitude changes, he’s eating teeth at the end of the year.”


“Has school officially started, Professor Dumbledore?”

“No.”

“Good. You can’t take points yet, you greasy little git. And it wasn’t a threat. It’s a promise for the end of the year. Assuming, of course, that I survive the Seventh Annual Moldieshorts Parade.” He could hear that, against her will, Hermione snorted, joined by Madame Pomfrey. “I’m sorry, but you have treated me like crap all these years, Professor Snape, for no other reason that you hated my father.”

“The only way your father figures into this is the way you have inherited his arrogance. I’ve treated you no worse than I needed in order to bring you down off your high horse and teach you what it’s like not to be pampered.”

Harry could hear Hermione inhale, sharply, and put his hand out to catch her wrist before she could retort. “Don’t bother, Hermione. It’s not worth it. Maybe someday he can really check out the Dursleys for himself. Try to pass for a Muggle and ask them about their nephew. If that’s being pampered, then everybody else is using the word incorrectly.” He paused. “By the way, sir, how does it feel, being the chemistry teacher for St. Brutus’ School for Incurably Criminal Boys?”

“What are you on about, Potter?” Snape snarled.

“That’s where I go to school, when I’m not at my Aunt and Uncle’s house. At least, if you talk to Vernon, that’s the case.” He took a deep breath. “Rather than getting petty revenges like destroying my potions, or seeing to it that the best Defence teacher we’ve had gets fired, why don’t you use..."
Harry scowled for a long moment. "You're right, headmaster," he finally said with a resigned sigh. He turned to 'look' at Snape. "Professor Snape? My outburst was uncalled for. I have my opinion of you, but this situation with the Weasleys has more than a little bothered." He took a deep breath. "I took out my anger and frustration at the situation, and the probable end of a six year relationship on you, and for that, I apologize. I was wrong."

"You may have done more for your cause, Harry," the headmaster admonished. "But you're also saying to go light on him?"

Harry chuckled mirthlessly. "A little difficult at the moment, since I'm stone blind right now. I can only guess where you're standing. Once ... if ... I can see again, I'll make a proper apology, looking at you and everything, all right?"

"Understandable, Mister Potter," came the response. "I appreciate the apology. Though it would have been polite of you to at least look at me while you gave it."

"Harry ..." the headmaster admonished.

Harry took a deep breath, then let it out again, visibly letting go of his anger. "No, forget I said anything. You're too damned hide-bounded to look into anything that might change your comfortable world view. Might hurt your brain to think you might have treated me unfairly from the moment you heard a Potter was coming to the school."

"Screw this," he grumbled, staring sightlessly up at the ceiling. "All I've done is make sure that I get even more points taken from Gryffindor, for talking back to the professor when I answer a question he asked me, or get detentions because I accidentally dropped my potion once it was actually in the teacher's hands. Tell you what, Snape - since I'm gonna get the points removed anyway, why don't I just make sure they're actually earned for once?"

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"You may have done more for your cause, Harry," the headmaster said with a smile, "than you could possibly be aware."

"He was stunned, Harry!" Hermione murmured quietly. "He never expected an apology from you. I think you may have finally convinced him that you aren't your father."

"Doesn't matter one way or the other, right now. What I'm worried about right now, Professor, is what's going to happen to Ron. That was an attack, in front of witnesses. You also have the problem that being proper in your treatment of him could be seen as favouritism for me. You'll probably have to be lenient with him, just to be looked at as being fair to the other students."

"Why are you doing this, Harry?" Hermione asked incredulously. "He hit you so hard that he broke two of your ribs. Your head broke the glass on the train and you could be blind. By rights he should be expelled. And you're saying to go light on him?"

"What was the reason he attacked me? Had you just broken up with him officially, by chance? If so, then he wasn't in his right mind at the time, and would be able to defend himself on the grounds of diminished capacity."

He could almost hear her blinking. "Where did you learn that one?"

"Dudley, just before the Dursleys permanently expelled me from their home. He'd been arrested by the Bobbies for hitting his girlfriend, well, ex-girlfriend, and that was the defence that they successfully used. Not that he had all that much capacity to be diminished, in my opinion."

"But that as it may be," Dumbledore said, finally injecting himself into the conversation, "Ronald will of necessity be stripped of his prefect status. He has set a very bad example for other students, and that cannot be tolerated. I have Minerva composing the letter to Molly, which will explain the reasoning for the removal of his prefect status, and explain that we are being quite lenient in permitting him to remain a student at Hogwarts. My current problem is trying to figure out which student from your year to give the badge to."

Harry thought for a long moment, and then looked to Professor Dumbledore. "Neville. Seamus is too likely to simply go along with what the others want, and Dean - well, Dean never struck me as having the interest in doing that sort of thing. It would cut into his drawing time, and that would be one of his criteria. That leaves Neville, who has the drive to prove himself, and is also smart enough to realize the quiet message you're sending to the rest of the students."

"And that message is?" Dumbledore asked, smiling.

"We're watching you. Don't even think it." He laughed, and turned his head to Hermione, who had a smile. "You should smile more, Hermione. You're much prettier with a smile on your face."

"You can see me?" she asked, her expression happy.

"Well, yeah. I can see you smiling, and you're twirling a lock of your hair nervously, like you do sometimes."

Madame Pomfrey came out in time to hear that, and quickly ran her wand over his head. "How are you doing that, Mister Potter?" She paused. "How clear is your vision?"

"Clear enough to see the worried looks on all your faces. Why what's wrong?"
You aren't wearing your glasses, Harry,” Hermione said. “Your vision isn’t usually that good.”

He consciously closed his eyes, and noticed that the vision didn’t fade the way it normally did. Leaving them closed, he concentrated on looking at Hermione, and her face came back into sharp focus. He carefully sat up in the bed. “I can see you right now, Hermione.”

“How many fingers am I holding up?” she asked in curiosity, holding up her hand such that only her thumb was raised.

“Depends. Do you classify the thumb as a finger? If so, one. If not, none.”

The room was extremely quiet. “Very interesting, Harry,” Dumbledore finally said. “I believe we shall have to study this further. Will you be able to make it to the Welcoming Feast?”

“I think so. If Hermione doesn’t mind being there for me as a guide dog if this ability fades out.”

“I wasn’t there for you all last year, Harry. I’ll be here for you this year.”

“Just promise me that if it’s a choice between grades and getting me to a class on time, choose your grades.”

“No,” was her simple answer.

“No?” he asked, surprised.

“No, I will not promise you any such thing. You are my friend – quite possibly my only friend left here at Hogwarts. If the choice came down to getting good grades or being expelled for doing something that saved you, I’d choose expulsion. Books and knowledge are good, but it’s bravery and heart and soul that are the real treasures in this world, Harry Potter. Don’t take this wrong, but I love you. You’re my best friend, and if it meant you’d defeat Voldemort, I’d throw myself in front of an A-K for you.”

“Please don’t,” he said quietly. “I love you the same way, Hermione. You are the best friend I have ever had in my life, and my life would be a lot darker without you in it to tell me all the things that I shouldn’t be doing, since you’re so often right.”

She opened her mouth to respond, but the hospital wing doors slammed open. “Harry!” came a relieved voice, and he suddenly found himself being hugged quite strongly by Pansy Parkinson.

He was finally released by the black-haired girl when he tapped her shoulder and croaked, “Can’t breathe.” She released him, blushing, and he smiled at her. “I’m happy to see you too, Pansy,” he laughed.

“I’ve come to a decision, Harry,” she said finally. “We need to choose sides in this war, and too many people are sitting on the fence. I’m going to support you, for good or ill. Draco and I will probably divide Slytherin right down the middle when I do that.”

“It could put you at great risk, you know,” Hermione said.

Pansy bit her lower lip. “I know. And no one will trust me because I’m Slytherin, and even worse, the cause for your break-up with Ginny Weasley.”

“I hope that was just you speaking the way people will look at things, Pansy, and not what you really think,” Harry said. “You are not the cause of the break-up. Bill and Charlie Weasley are. They used our friendship to break up Ginny and me.” He scowled. “I don’t know how to react, to be honest. I still feel like I love Ginny. I want to forgive her, because it was her brothers playing on her trust of them, and the supposition that they would never do anything to hurt her badly. But I also want to rail and scream at her for not trusting the five years she’s known me. Same with Ron, although I have other, completely separate reasons for being angry at him.” He looked at Pansy, struck again by how pretty she could be. He held out his hand and a small box popped into it. “Pansy? They used the ring that I was going to give Ginny as a promise ring as proof that I was cheating on her. Take a look at the writing on the note.”

His vision faded slightly as he thought about what they had done, and found himself getting just a little tired. “It’s good,” Pansy said, “but not good enough. I’ve been involved in some of Draco’s schemes over the years, and I was his forger. You and I worked together enough last year and sent enough owls back and forth that I’ve learned your style.”

Hermione snorted. “You could probably get a job as a Muggle forensic handwriting expert,” she finally said. “They do exactly what you just did, and they’re pretty well paid, too.”

“Harry,” Pansy finally said, “how did you bring this ring to you? Is your wand strapped to your arm or something?”

“No. I’ve been doing a lot of wandless magic in the last handful of months.” He turned to face Dumbledore. “Why did I do so well getting Bill and Charlie out of my room in St. Mungo’s, and keeping Ron from getting to me that day, but then Ron blew right through and was able to hit me on the Express?”

“How prepared were you when Ronald came into the compartment on the Express?” asked headmaster.

“Not at all.” He paused, obviously thinking. “I had the time to prepare in the hospital. And here, I decided that I really wanted to see. Interesting. If I have time to plan, I can do things wandlessly. Without an incantation, even.”

Dumbledore looked seriously at him. “The ability to do wandless magic in a controlled manner is quite uncommon. Most children do uncontrolled magic when they’re quite young, but most stop by the time they’re your age. If you can, indeed, access your magic reliably without a wand, it could be quite an advantage. One best kept as secret as possible.”
"We'll keep it between us," said Pansy.

"But Bill, Charlie, and Ron all know. You used it on them at the hospital, Harry," said Hermione.

"At the time, I was angry. So were they. They may not remember it clearly, or chalk it up to something like when I blew up Aunt Marge. That was uncontrolled. If one of them does mention it, we could pass it off that way."

Dumbledore nodded. "That will have to suffice. Hopefully it will be enough to keep the secret."

Harry looked back to Pansy. "By the way, Pansy, if you want the ring, you might as well take it. If they want to believe that I could make love to a woman, and then buy a different one a ring the very next day, then someone ought to enjoy the ring. It might as well be the woman everyone thinks I was cheating with."

"No, Harry," Pansy said. "That will only make it worse. Keep the ring."

"No. Bill and Charlie destroyed its meaning, so I don't want it anymore. Do with it what you will."

He watched as the two girls shared a look, and then Pansy handed the box to Hermione. Hermione said, "This should make the point to everyone. We all saw the ring when they 'proved' that you were cheating on Ginny with this ring. But with me wearing it, it should make them wonder, since it was obviously meant for Pansy." She looked to Harry. "May I, Harry?"

He nodded. "Now Ginny will hate you even more, you know," he said. "Professor? I think that we may need that table again—the one we used for Pansy and me last year? Give it enough room for at least five people, though. There's no way that the Gryffindors will permit me to eat in peace at their table, and I think—well, Luna's already hated by her classmates, and being my friend is just going to make things worse for her. And with Hermione, Pansy, and Luna at that table, Susan is likely to show her true Hufflepuff loyalties and want to eat with us, if she acts like she did on the train."

"You think I wouldn't?" Susan said as she walked into the room, Luna behind her. "I can't speak for the entire house, but I'm with you, Harry."

"I will see to it immediately, then," Dumbledore said. "Please, if you can, be down to dinner in fifteen minutes. I wish you to be there when I revoke Mister Weasley's prefect status." With that, he breezed from the room.

####

Ten minutes later, the doors opened to let the five students in, and the Great Hall went immediately silent. "Hello to you too, Hogwarts!" Harry said in a cheery voice. He didn't feel the emotion, however. He breezed to the table that had been set up near the front of the room, the four girls walking behind him as if they were his bodyguards and entourage. They sat down as one at the small table. The Gryffindor table looked at him angrily, and Harry knew the moment that Ginny caught what Hermione wore on her right hand, since Ginny's face took on an ugly red hue and transformed into one of the ugliest scowls of rage he had ever seen on anyone. He couldn't resist; he lifted his right hand and waggled his fingers impudently at her. She put her thumb to her mouth and bit it. "Love you too, Ginny!" he said brightly, which only made her angrier.

"Do you really have to antagonize her?" Hermione said.

"Hey, she bit her thumb at me," he said simply, shrugging.

The doors opened again a few minutes later to show Professor McGonagall leading the new first year students into the Great Hall. There were about eighty of them in the group, and when the sorting was done, a disproportionate number had been sorted into Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff. Harry found it interesting to note that the ones who got Gryffindor looked quickly at him before their faces fell slightly, and they marched to the Gryffindor table.

"Looks like a few people are unhappy to be in the same House as that vile betrayer Harry Potter," Hermione murmured angrily.

"That's 'Sultan Vile Betrayer' to you," he quoted with a smile. Hermione chuckled at him while the other three girls developed confused looks.

"Later," he promised.

"How can you be so calm and … and humorous about this?" she asked angrily a moment later. "They're dragging your name through the mud, and you don't care?"

Keeping the smile plastered on his face, he said, "Of course I care. But they want to see me squirm, and suffer. So I keep a happy face for them, and thoughts of the looks on their faces on the day that Bill and Charlie decide to come clean about what they did just help me stay happy, in a nasty way. I just hope that it's at a gathering of the Weasleys that I can be at for some reason."

Before Dumbledore could speak, an owl flew into the room and dropped a small package in front of Harry. He opened it to find a letter on top of a small box.

Harry,

Please read this all the way through before destroying it. This is Fred and George, and we want you to know that not every Weasley is an arsehole. We believe you. The box contains some things to use if the situation with Ginevra or Ronald gets too far out of hand on their side of things.

Given Bill and Charlie's lies, and the fact that the rest of our family has not only believed them despite knowing you but accepted Percy back into the fold because "he was right about you"—well, the only reason we're still keeping the Weasley name is for brand recognition.
There are times we wonder if we’re really Weasleys at all. Sad, really.

Gred and Forge

“Well, that’s interesting,” Harry said with a genuine smile as he handed the letter to Hermione. The letter quickly made the rounds of the four girls. As Susan shook her head and handed it back to Harry, Dumbledore stood finally and spoke.

“Before we get to the portion of the evening that so many of you are waiting for, there are the standard warnings I must give. The Forbidden Forest is named such for a reason. If you wish to survive, then please pay attention to this warning. The list of forbidden items at this school can be found attached to Caretaker Filch’s office door, although those of you with catalogues for Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes will find that you already possess the list.” Laughter flowed through the Great Hall. “I am saddened to announce that there must be a matter of discipline performed here tonight, before we get to the feast. Ronald Weasley; Neville Longbottom – will you please approach the head table?”

The two stood apprehensively and walked forward, as they began to walk by the table that Harry and the girls sat at, comprehension dawned in Ron’s eyes and he looked a death glare at Harry. Harry merely smiled beatifically at him. When they had approached the table, Dumbledore said, “As much as it pains me to do this, I fear that I must. What happened on the Hogwarts Express today was inexcusable. Never in my history has any student been attacked such that the injured party had to be immediately removed to Hogwarts hospital wing. By itself, this would have been bad enough, but for the assailant to be a prefect, and the reason for the attack other than defence of another student, well, I fear that I must revoke your prefect status, Mister Weasley. I will be giving the prefect badge to Neville Longbottom in your place.” He turned to Neville. “I expect that you will fill the position responsibly and honourably, Mister Longbottom.”

“I will, sir,” Neville said. At being obviously dismissed, both turned and returned to the Gryffindor table, Ron giving Harry a look that clearly said, “You’ll pay for this.”
Like A Phoenix From The Ashes
Chapter 4

During the feast, the girls chattered with each other, getting to know one another and beginning to overcome House boundaries. Harry remained mostly silent, lost in thought. Finally, as the pudding course was served, Harry stood and walked up to the head table. There were murmurs around the Hall – this was never done by any student! He could hear quiet statements of “Look at him – little bastard loves the spotlight, doesn’t he?” “As if he’s got important business with anyone there.” “I hope Dumbledore tears the little wanker a new one for this.”

Harry heard this and ignored it as best he could. Dumbledore rose from his seat and walked to the end of the head table, stepping down from the raised dais so that he and Harry could speak quietly.

“Professor Dumbledore,” Harry asked quietly, “could you meet with me and Professor Snape as soon as possible? Like, before everyone has to go back to their dorms?”

“Might I assume that it has something to do with your current situation? More precisely, what may happen to Miss Parkinson?” Harry nodded. “Has it occurred to you that the others may well be in danger, if your feelings are correct?” Harry started at that, and Professor Dumbledore nodded. “I shall have the heads of your respective households meet in my office roughly twenty minutes after the feast is completed. I would not complain were you to be there early.” He smiled widely. “Bring your entourage as well,” he laughed softly.

Harry returned to the table and sat heavily. “What’s wrong?” Susan asked in alarm.

“Tired. Seeing is taking a lot out of me, I find.” He sagged slightly. “Hermione? I’ll need your guide dog services. I’m going to drop the sight for a while. Besides, this way, everyone can think that Dumbledore gave me bad news, since they want it to be the case so badly.” He allowed his vision to fade.

“Did you lose your vision when Ronald struck you?” Luna asked, sounding surprisingly normal.

“Apparently. Irritated the injury from when Charlie hit me in the head with a chair.”

“To think that I was attracted to Ronald,” Luna said sadly, the dreamy quality slipping back into her voice. “Is it permanent?”

“No, fortunately. But it will take a while to come back completely, so until then I’m using magic and Hermione’s good services.”

He heard murmurs of sympathy around the table, and Hermione suddenly said very quietly, “Harry! Take off your glasses. We’ll get the headmaster and Madam Pomfrey to say that they were charmed to let you see, but that they’re tiring, or hindering your recovery, or something. That explains why you were looking at people, but still need me to guide you.”

“You’re right,” he murmured in response, taking off his glasses and pocketing them carefully. “Just taking the glasses off will lead them to think in that direction.” He smiled. “It’s nice having one of the most brilliant witches around as a friend.”

“Thank you, Harry!” Susan laughed, to which he snorted his own laughter.

“Oh, ladies?” Harry said, when the laughter had ended, “we all need to go to the headmaster’s office after the feast is over. We’ll be talking with the heads of the households.”

“Why?” Pansy asked.

“Because of you, actually. You’re my friend, Pansy, and I really don’t want to attend your funeral. I wouldn’t put it past Malfoy to have you killed now that you’re coming out on my side. Dumbledore realized that something might need to be done.”

Sobered, they all picked at their puddings until the feast was over.

####

They entered the headmaster’s office, unsurprised to discover him already there, despite having left the Great Hall before he had. Hermione began to explain her thoughts concerning the glasses, but he stopped her. “Excellent thinking, Miss Granger. Leave it to me. Since we will be talking to the heads of each House, they can pass word on to the students.” He paused. “I know how the summer went for both Mister Potter and Miss Granger. My condolences on the loss of your grandfather, Miss Parkinson. Beyond that, how was your summer?”

“Quite nice, actually. I spent it with my family in a little vacation spot we have access to.” Harry could hear her loading the statement such that Dumbledore would know exactly where she referred to. “Quite pleasant out there.”

“Excellent. How was your summer, Miss Bones?”

“Same as it ever was, sir. Some fun, some heartache, some sunburn,” she laughed.

“Except for the heartache, I am glad to hear it. Ah, I can hear that our professors are here.”

Harry could hear people shuffle into the room and take seats. He reached carefully for his glasses and put them on, and then focused on seeing. “Professor Snape,” he said, looking at his Potions professor, “now that I can use these glasses to see, I’m going to give you a proper apology.”
"There is no need, Mister Potter. I understand your reasoning."

"Still, sir, I feel a need to do it properly. You were right – you do deserve to be looked in the eye when someone apologizes for being a jerk. I was frustrated with the treatment I had been receiving from the Weasley family, and took it out on someone with no connection to the situation. I apologize."

"Thank you, Mister Potter. Perhaps we can talk at some point about some of the points that you raised during your cathartic experience – talk like reasonable adults."

"I'd like that, sir. Now, if none of you mind, I'm taking off the glasses again." He slumped slightly as the weariness struck him.

"Mister Potter's glasses are currently charmed to allow him sight," Dumbledore explained, "but it requires concentration, which can be tiring, as we all know. Please allow him some latitude until his sight comes back. Poppy is quite certain that it will."

"The reason for this gathering, however, is to discuss strategies for dealing with the potential backlash that these four may receive for siding with Mister Potter. We believe Miss Parkinson to be in the most danger."

She spoke up. "Sir? I don't know if you know it, but Draco is a Death Nibbler – sorry, a Death Eater. He doesn't have the tattoo, having successfully argued that it would cause difficulties here at the school. But his loyalties, as far as I've ever known, are solidly behind his father, who is solidly behind Voldemort. I have no intention of carrying on the charade from last year any further. I lo … like Harry a lot, and intend to support him fully. Given the situation with his supposed friends, even pretending would disrespect a man who did not have to help myself and my family, but did anyway." He heard her sit back in her seat defiantly.

"What were you going to say?" he whispered to her.

"Never you mind, Harry," she said. He was confused by her tone, which sounded vaguely embarrassed.

"I am reluctant to take action on such, with only an accusation," Professor Snape said. "However, I know the little … I know the child's proclivities, and while I do not believe that death would necessarily be the result, there are things far worse than death to commit upon someone. If only to protect her virtue, I believe that we should find her a place to stay for this year."

He was answered with a snort of amusement from Pansy. "A little late for that. Whatever virtue I had is long gone."

"Excuse me, Pansy," Harry said. "I'll not have you insulting any of my friends."

"Harry," she said, "you know my history with Draco."

"So you were into bestiality and slept with a weasel for a while. So did I. At least you did it to save your life. I was foolish enough to think it was love." At the sharp intakes of breath in the room, he shook his head. "I'm sorry, everyone. I'll take the detention."

He heard McGonagall start to speak, but Dumbledore cut her off. "Given what the Weasley brothers caused the family to do to you, it is quite understandable. Please do curtail it if possible, however."

McGonagall finally spoke. "Do you intend to sit there and tell me, Albus, that William and Charles intentionally …"

"Exactly, Minerva. Harry allowed me into his mind in order to verify the truth of the situation. I was truly in his mind, Severus – it was no constructed memory. Miss Parkinson can confirm her side of the supposed … ahem … transaction."

"Harry has never touched me in the manner that the eldest Weasleys accuse him of doing. If he had, I think I'd have remembered it." Harry could hear the slight smile at the end of her statement, and chuckled.

"I'd hope I could make it memorable," he murmured.

"That's why what they did was so unforgivable," Hermione said sadly. "It was. She loved him and was sure she'd found her future husband. They damaged both Ginny and Harry. She just hasn't realized it yet."

Harry came to a decision. "Pansy – you're moving into my Head Boy bedroom, and I'm taking the couch in the small common room that Hermione and I share. Professor Dumbledore? Get Dobby to move her things that are still in one piece to the Head Boy room. Please."

"Harry, you can't sleep on a couch all school year," Susan said.

Harry snorted. "I spent ten years in a cupboard under the stairs at Privet Drive – I think a couch will be easy to handle for my last ten months here."

The silence at his simple statement was palpable. He paused. "No, wait. Just having her there would confirm the rumors, since she'd be in my bed. People would carefully ignore that I was nowhere near the bed during those times. I suppose we could move her in with Hermione, but they'd be kind of cramped." He 'looked' at Pansy (he hoped) and said, "Sorry. I'll try to think of something else."

"You really slept in a cupboard?" Susan asked in a small voice.

"Yeah. I don't anymore. Well, I didn't since the first Hogwarts letter, but I definitely don't since my seventeenth birthday, when the Dursleys kicked me out and the provisions of both my parents' and Sirius' wills came into effect. I'm a homeowner now, and all the headaches that come with that are actually kind of fun to deal with."

"How can you be so calm about this?" Hermione asked. "You never even told Ron and me about your living conditions. I mean, I knew that they..."
"I hated having you around, but a cupboard?"

"It's what was necessary to keep me safe. The blood protections were paramount – there was no one else to even contemplate switching them to, even if they could be. And I haven't been killed by Voldemort yet, so it obviously worked. Where's the worry? It's in the past. Couldn't change it, so why tear myself up over it?"

The room was silent for a while, before Professor Sprout spoke. "I can only hope that Hufflepuff House will treat Harry fairly. I'll keep my eyes open for unsavoury things."

"So will I," Susan said sternly. "Harry's my friend, and we Hufflepuff are known for loyalty. I'm also fairly respected, so I'd like to think that I can sway a few of the members of my household, if not all of them. I may be premature with this, but our little group may want, once a week or so, to sit en masse at the Hufflepuff table, if I'm right about how my House will react."

"I'm just glad I don't bring anything truly valuable to school," Luna said in a soft voice. "For such a brilliant group of minds, the Ravenclaws often do not think, and thus lose friends."

"Do you think they'll actively destroy your things?" Hermione asked.

"I wouldn't be surprised. I've always been their goat as far as pranks go, but now they'll decide I've gone too far." She sighed. "Any excuse, really. Cruelty comes so easily."

"So we need to worry about Luna, too," said Harry, scrubbing his face tiredly with his hands. "I'm about out of ideas. Anybody?"

He felt a faint flare of magic around him, and he heard the thump of a book hitting the floor. Robes rustled as people turned to see what had caused the thump and Dumbledore rose from his seat.

"How interesting," Professor Dumbledore murmured a moment later, after apparently picking up the volume that had fallen. "Here is a map of Hogwarts, and it appears to show two separate rooms near the Head Boy's and Head Girl's rooms, which connect to the common room that the Head Boy and Girl share. The common room for those suites appears larger than I remember, as well." He chuckled. "It appears, Harry, that the school likes you. It has rarely ever intervened this directly. Dobby?"

A popping noise sounded. "How may Dobby help, sir?"

"I need you, if you would, to have the house elves move both Miss Parkinson's and Miss Lovegood's possessions into these rooms, respectively." Harry was sure that Dumbledore was pointing at his map.

"Dobby had wondered why those rooms had appeared, sir. Dobby will be glad to do this for friends of Harry Potter! Dobby will do it right now!" He popped out of the room again.

"Perhaps we should get you to your rooms, then," Professor Dumbledore said with a smile evident in his voice. "By the time we reach them, the house elves should have finished with their work."
Like A Phoenix From The Ashes
Chapter 5

“Just remember, Mister Potter – use the ability as little as possible,” Madame Pomfrey told him. “I understand that there are certain classes where you require sight almost all the time, but in those where you can get away with it, I would recommend just letting your Quick Notes Quill do your work for you.”

“Okay. I've got a question for you. I'm not arguing with your diagnosis – it's just curiosity. What's the reason for not overdoing it with the magical vision, other than the fact that it will tire me out faster than a hard day on the Quidditch pitch?”

“Well, the damage was quite severe. You wouldn't expect it to be the case, but those nerves need a workout as well while healing. If you continue to circumvent them, you may train your brain to use that form of seeing, rather than the natural way, and it could leave you permanently blind.”

He paused for a long moment before saying “Well, couldn't ask for it any blunter than that. Thank you, Madame Pomfrey.” He laughed. “Being honest and scaring me a little is more likely to work than anything else.”

He could hear the smile in her voice as she answered him. “Sometimes that's what's needed. Now go, you have places to be, I'm certain.”

He gave her what he was sure his best puppy dog look. “Don't you love me anymore? You always try to keep me here after an injury.”

She laughed – a happy sound. “Get out of here, you scamp!” He smiled back at her and stood, and almost immediately the girls were by his side. He felt one take his left arm gently, and another take his right, and they began to walk.

They led Harry back to their shared quarters and got him settled in the chair nearest his room. As soon as he was seated, he heard things moving about, and found himself so curious that he simply had to ask, “What exactly are you ladies doing?”

“We’re moving things around, Harry. Trying to make it easier for you to get around the suite,” Hermione replied. “Madame Pomfrey gave me this absolutely wonderful book on adaptive living for the blind, and I'm trying to get things set up easier for you.”

“What about your say in all this?” he asked. “After all, you live here too.”

“I'm sorry if this sounds wrong, but I can see. It's much easier for me to get around obstacles.”

“It doesn't sound wrong – it's simple truth. What sort of things are in the book?”

She laughed. “The funny thing is – it's a Muggle book! They annotated for wizards and witches, but they're using a book written for Muggles! They talk about arranging things such as money, which I suppose we can worry about in June, if you're still blind, considering you can tell the difference between Galleons, Sickles and Knuts by touch. We'll rearrange you clothing to make it easier for you, so that if you reach in on one side, you know you'll be grabbing a pair of trousers, for example, and shirts in the middle of the cupboard, and robes on the opposite side from your trousers. Probably should rearrange your … well – ”

He could hear the blush, and he chuckled slightly. “Admit it, Hermione. You're just looking forward to getting your hands on my boxers.”

The silence was profound, and Harry began to get worried. “Hermione?” he asked. When he didn't receive an answer, he began to stand. “Hermione? I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you. Please, let me apologize.”

He finally heard a snort from a short distance away. “I'm sorry Harry,” Hermione finally answered, trying very hard not to laugh, from the sound of things. “I didn't mean to make … oh heavens …” She fell to laughing for a few moments before she was finally able to continue onward. “… sorry … I didn't mean to make you think you'd offended me. I never expected something like that from you, and then … well, maybe the incongruity of the situation made it funny.” He heard her come closer and felt her hands rest gently on his shoulders. “Harry, I'm sorry that I worried you – that I made you think I was offended.” There was pressure on his shoulders, and then he felt her lips touch his forehead. “Please forgive me?”

“Nothing to forgive,” he said with relief. “I just – I have four friends left in the student body, and I really don't want to lose any of them through my own stupidity. I can't control other people's attempts to break us up, but … look, all I ask of all of you is that you remember that I don't mean to offend you, and if I do, to let me know so that I can try to make it right. Okay?”

“We understand,” Susan replied with a smile that he could hear. In what sounded like an obvious attempt to lighten the mood she added, “If you'd like, I'll rearrange your underwear drawer. Tell my fellow 'Puffs that I had my hands in your pants - they'll be so jealous of me!” She ended with a laugh.

“Go for it, Susan,” he replied with his own laugh.

Harry's schooling became more interesting, certainly, with the blindness causing changes to his routines. He now used a Quick Quill for taking notes, which meant that at least his History of Magic notes were far more complete than ever before. This was also about the only class where he did not need to use his vision, since Binns never performed any demonstrations in his classroom. With no sight, he found it that especially hard to remain awake in the room.

The other professors made an effort to work with him, and most of the classes were not problem. Potions, on the other hand, was more of a nightmare than they usually were, and that took into account Professor Snape easing back on him emotionally. This was the one class that required
The expected response from Gryffindor began the very first day. He couldn't tell who it was, but someone removed his glasses with magic and dropped them into his cauldron. The skin oils reacted badly with the delicate potion within, and he found himself in the Hospital Wing afterwards dealing with second degree burns from the burst of flame from his cauldron.

As he lay in the hospital bed feeling his skin tingle as it healed, he contemplated revenge. I can still get into the Gryffindor Tower - hell, I can get into all the common rooms - so I think a little reminder needs to be given them. But not yet.

He heard a noise and turned his head toward it. Focusing through the headache it started, he saw a limping and bruised Hermione being held up by Susan and Pansy. "What happened?" he heard Madame Pomfrey gasp. He dropped the vision and the headache began to clear immediately.

"More like those Gryffindor bitches ganging up on you," Susan growled. "You'll likely see them shortly, once they can figure out how to move them."

"We, uh, we got a little exuberant in defence of our friend," Pansy said softly. In some ways, this was a Pansy that Harry didn't really know very well. He was used to the brassy, in control young woman whom he had taken to thinking of as a close friend, but a shy and somewhat demure Pansy was not what he thought of as normal.

Why would she be embarrassed by defending Hermione? he asked himself. He lay on the bed and smiled as he heard Hermione being placed on the one next to him. "Hey there, Hermione. What happened?"

"Parvati and Lavender decided to teach 'the prissy little bookworm' a thing about loyalty," she said smartly. "We traded barbs about you, and then they decided to forgo wands. I like to think that I taught them a few things about 'the prissy little bookworm' before they decided to pull their wands out. That's when Susan and Pansy stepped in with an interesting variation on the sticking charm. They either show up naked, or the headmaster frees them."

It was just then that the doors opened again and Harry could hear Pansy and Susan shift position, obviously to guard Hermione. There were sharp inhalations at the door, and Harry risked looking through the headache it started. Parvati and Lavender were being escorted into the Hospital Wing by Minerva McGonagall and Albus Dumbledore. Both girls were dressed, so their freedom had been gained by other means.

"I want answers as to what has happened," McGonagall said with harsh asperity.

Harry heard the inhalations of Parvati and Lavender and spoke before they could. "Headmaster, are you here as well?"

"Yes, Harry."

"Could a Pensieve be a good thing to use here? If so, I can donate the use of my own." He smiled inwardly, because he was quite certain that Parvati and Lavender were now trying to figure out how to avoid punishment.

"I believe that we can forgo the Pensieve, Harry, although I appreciate the offer. I am certain that the truth will be told by all involved. If necessary, however ..." he finished, making his point clearly.

Lavender and Parvati broke down and admitted their actions, which led to detentions and their not getting access to bruise relief potions. Hermione, Susan and Pansy managed to convince Madam Pomfrey to allow Harry back to his suite, where they could help care for his burns as well.

By the next morning, the worst part of his injury was gone - barely pink from his burns. He spoke softly with the girls at the table, and informed them of his plans to prank Gryffindor Tower, since he was certain that it had been a fellow Gryffindor who had sabotaged his potion. They talked through ideas, and the week continued in its usual way. They finally settled on a prank at the end of the week, and set about planning how to pull it off.

It was a particularly tiring day in Potions next week - it seemed that his headaches wouldn't go away no matter if his vision was on or off. He sat through most classes with his eyes closed, wincing. It had been so bad that Professor Snape had even handed him a headache potion without breaking stride or making a comment.

Hermione flanked him on his return to the suite, and people were already learning that she had become quite fast with her wand. He headed straight into his room and mumbled "Nap," to the girls as he passed by them.

He awoke a short time later feeling much better than he had a mere ninety minutes earlier, he noted as he glanced at his clock. Thank God, no head for the first time today. He slipped on his glasses and started to sit up, and then realized what he had just done. He closed his eyes and everything went away. Before reopening his eyes, he made triply certain that he was not using his magic to see, and slowly opened his eyes. His room came into focus through his glasses. He closed and opened them multiple times, enjoying the fact that he could now see without magic.

He bounced from his bed and ran to his door, opening it quickly. "Hey girls! I can ... ohmigod!" He was stunned as he found himself looking around the room to see four very comfortable young women. Luna was in a chair wearing a look of concentration as she read one of her textbooks. That was all she wore, and Harry noted absentely that her position showed him that her hair colour was natural, even if she did seem to have trimmed it into the shape of a heart. Hermione sat with her back against one of the arms of the sofa in simple white bra and knickers, her right foot in the lap of Pansy Parkinson, who was painting the brunette's toenails. Pansy was in a nightgown that might as well have left her naked, it was
to take the time to decide if I'm making the right decision? For telling me that my friendship means so much to you that you don't want to lose it?"

"Forgive you for thinking so much of me that you won't let me run the risk of hurting you because I'm not thinking clearly? Forgive you for helping me second, I think that … well, it's too soon.  It only happened in early August, and it's just too soon."  He kissed her forehead.  "I'm

"You're a woman who knows what she wants, and is

He pulled her into an embrace and kissed her forehead.  "If you're a slut, then the word has taken on so broad a meaning as to be meaningless.

"Especially Luna and her current mode of dress.

He nervously pulled her closer and said shakily, "I was thinking, rather, of the girl with the best … uh …"  He pulled her back slightly, pressing against her, blushing furiously.

"We're friends.  I don't want to lose that," he said, pain evident in his voice as he tried to disengage from her breasts.

"We won't, Harry.  I'd just like to become friends with benefits.  I want my virginity to go to a man that I trust, and there is no man here at school that I trust more."  She giggled.  "To be honest, Harry, you make me rather horny, and it's nice to know that the feeling is mutual."

"Why not?"

"We're not going to mistake this for love, are we? I won't let that happen again, mistaking lust for love."

"So all you felt for Ginny was lust?" she asked, coming closer to him.  He closed his eyes tightly to keep from ogling his friend.

"I thought I did.  I wanted her to be so happy, no matter what.  I'd have done anything for that."  He scowled.  "Then again, that's what her brothers were doing - anything."  He grumbled incoherently for a few moments.  "Oh, I still wish I could hold her, or caress her, and I can't say as I'd complain about inviting her back into my bed when I was sure that she really understood what we were doing - anything."  He grumbled.

"We're not going to mistake this for love, are we? I won't let that happen again, mistaking lust for love."

"You're my friend, Susan.  I shouldn't be even thinking what I am."  He blushed, scowling angrily.

"Why not?"

"Because I certainly couldn't feel it for all four of you girls in so rapid a time, and I'm starting to.  I want to be friends, with benefits, with all four of you, but I know that it's my hormones speaking at having four beautiful girls around."

"Especially Luna and her current mode of dress."

He nervously pulled her closer and said shakily, "I was thinking, rather, of the girl with the best … uh …"  He pulled her back slightly, pressing against her, blushing furiously.

"You think I have a nice arse?" she asked in a voice that sounded hopeful.

"Actually, I've always rather thought you had the best one in the school," he murmured quietly.  He took a deep breath.  "Susan, you should leave.  I want what you're offering so badly that if I take advantage of that now, I know it will be a mistake.  We both can look at each other tomorrow when our bodies aren't screaming at us to fuck each other - sorry for the obscenity, but it's a good way to describe how I'm feeling right now - if we still think it might be a good idea to be friends with benefits, then we'll consider it."

"Are you sure, Harry?" she asked.  "I won't say your idea is bad, but I will admit that …"  She stopped and looked at him for a moment.  "Harry, are you agreeable to learning about fingers and tongues?"

"I already know about them," he said with a smile.  "I think I understand what you're suggesting.  I bring you down from where you're at, and you offer the same for me."

"Exactly!" she said.  She wriggled out of his grasp and turned around to face him.  "We're both very excited right now, and …"  She stopped suddenly.  With a worried look, she suddenly asked, "You don't think I'm a slut, do you? For being like this – so forward?"

He pulled her into an embrace and kissed her forehead.  "If you're a slut, then the word has taken on so broad a meaning as to be meaningless.  You're a woman who knows what she wants, and is figuring out ways to get it."  He looked at her for a long moment before straightening and gently pushing her away from himself.  "I think that it's best if we don't right now.  First off, neither of us is really in a position to be thinking clearly, and second, I think that … well, it's too soon.  It only happened in early August, and it's just too soon."  He kissed her forehead.  "I'm sorry, and I hope you can forgive me."

"Forgive you for thinking so much of me that you won't let me run the risk of hurting you because I'm not thinking clearly? Forgive you for helping me to take the time to decide if I'm making the right decision? For telling me that my friendship means so much to you that you don't want to lose it?"
She pulled his face down and kissed his cheek. “Of course I forgive you, although a man telling a woman that he thinks so highly of her doesn’t need forgiveness.” She turned around and walked to his door, wiggling her rear end slightly. “Doesn’t mean I won’t dress for effect around you, though. I know you like my looks, so I might as well accentuate them.” She left his room.

Susan walked over to an empty chair and sat down heavily, shivering heavily for a moment. Just before Hermione could ask if she was all right, Susan arched her back and released an obviously erotic gasp. “Oh Morgana,” she breathed. “That man does not know the power he wields, does he?”

“What happened?” Luna asked.

“He turned me down,” Susan said with a grin. “I hope you ladies know what a turn-on it is to have someone you want tell you he wants you, but respects you too much to act on it.”

“I was with Draco,” Pansy grumbled. “You tell me.”

“I flat out told him I wanted to be on his bed with my legs wrapped around him, and he turned me down! Chased me out when he realised how close to giving in he was. I decided to honour that.”

“You’re very lucky,” Hermione said. Susan looked up and saw more than a little sorrow in the Gryffindor girl’s eyes. “We all are,” she answered. “He feels the same way about all four of us. He’d call it love except for those fucking Weasleys.” At the Hermione’s look of disbelief and shock, Susan said, “He said so. He’s starting to feel the way for us that he did for Ginny. That, and the fact that he feels it for four people, makes him sure that it’s just a serious case of lust.”

“We’ll just have to re-educate him then, won’t we?” Luna said quietly. “After all, I find that I would not complain about a permanent relationship with you three and Harry.” The others blinked at her. “Then again, I am considered the odd one at the school. That may simply be my insanity speaking.”

Susan got up and walked over to her. “Then I’m insane too, Luna. Shall we head off to your room and … talk about it?”

Luna’s eyes widened ever so slightly and she stood. Susan put her arms around the girl slowly and drew closer, giving the pretty blonde a chance to stop her. Her answer was Luna leaning forward and actually initiating the kiss. The two girls then walked quietly out of the common room, hand in hand.

“I used to think that girl wasn’t quite right,” Hermione said quietly. “Now I think she’s the sanest of us all.” She stood. “I think I need to talk to Harry a bit.”

“Then he’ll tell me to talk to him later,” Hermione answered. She walked to the door and knocked. She could hear Harry come to the door.

“Yes?” came the muffled question.

“May I talk with you?” she asked. The door opened in response, and his eyes widened momentarily before he scowled.

“I’m sorry, Hermione, I shouldn’t …”

“I understand that Susan affected you, and I’m not offended.”

“Would you be angry with me if I said that she’s not the only one?” he asked quietly.

She dropped her face demurely and suddenly realised that she was causing Harry the same problem that Susan had. She’d been so comfortable in her underthings that she’d simply forgotten what she was wearing. While nowhere as prominent as Susan’s, her own nipples were making themselves obvious enough to anyone looking. “I’m sorry, Harry,” she said quickly. “I didn’t mean to … I wasn’t …”

He laughed and summoned his bath robe. “Here, if it’ll make you more comfortable.”

“I’m comfortable, but I’d imagine you aren’t,” she said, putting the robe on.

“Well, I’m just bothered that … how do I say it as to not be offensive …”

“May I try?” she asked him with a smile. When he nodded, she said, “You’re looking at the four of us and wanting to invite us into your bed, correct?”

He nodded. “You’re my best friend. I shouldn’t be thinking that about you.”

“Why not?” she asked simply. “Ignore love and lust and any number of other reasons you might want to get me naked. What’s wrong with looking at someone and having sexual thoughts about them?”

He blinked and opened his mouth to answer, but stopped. He closed his mouth and thought for quite some time before finally saying, “Well, if I take out all the other factors, as you asked, I guess thinking about it is okay.”
Exactly. So, the next thing to decide is this - what are you going to do about it? Susan has stated an interest, and I feel quite certain that Pansy and Luna would just as easily agree. As for myself? Well, I won't force myself on you, but I'm also not going to complain if someday you decide to conserve water and scrub my back while I'm in the shower, with the requisite reaching for anything you can touch.” She smiled, a slightly wicked expression. “We all care for you, and I can state with absolute certainty that two of us will certainly not complain if we woke up with you in our beds, naked. The other two I'm pretty sure feel the same way, with a better than ninety percent likelihood.”

"But …" he began.

"Right now, we’re not asking for anything, Harry. Other than your friendship, that is. Beyond that? We’ll see. But I'm simply stating that whether it's love or lust, we're all willing to be with you in a sexual manner. It's too early for you to think about that, I can tell. The damage that Ginny did is too fresh. We're here for you, though, no matter what for. A hug, a cuddle, or an all-out shag that brings the headmaster in telling us to keep the noise down.”

His jaw was nearly on the floor at her bluntness. She laughed and said, "What say we start with simple hugging?” She followed word with deed, and felt him relax against her.

"I love you, Hermione," he said finally. "Even if it only turns out to be the deep abiding feeling one has for one’s closest friends, I love you.”

"I love you too, Harry," she answered, tears in her eyes. She kissed his cheek and regretfully disengaged. "I'll let you get dressed for dinner, and then we'll head down together, okay?” He nodded and smiled back at her.
At dinner, the five sat enjoying themselves while they talked. Susan was glowing, and Luna also seemed quite happy. "Congrats, you two," Harry said honestly, a bit quietly.

"Thank you Harry," Luna said. "As Susan said, if you decide someday that you wish to be friends with benefits with Susan, I wouldn't complain if you considered me that way."

He cast a quick Silencing spell around their table. "We need to talk when we get back to the suite, about a number of things. The … ahem … 'mission' we have, as well as a couple other things. I'd talk about them here, but there are those who can read lips. In answer to your comment, Luna - if I were to do that, then I would consider it with all four of you. You are truly my dearest friends, and I don't want to lose that. If one becomes friends with benefits, you all do."

He laughed softly. "That sounds so business-like. While it might embarrass the hell out of me to say it, I think you all need to hear it. The four of you are going to be fuelling my fantasies for a while," he said with a blush. "I opened that door to see every guy's dream - four beautiful women wearing almost nothing. I will be dreaming about all four of you in the future, I guarantee. That is going to be one of my more cherished memories, I think."

He finished with a smile. "Anyone who tells you that you aren't beautiful, Luna, is lying to you."

"Are you calling us wank material?" Pansy teased.

"Well … um … yeah," he replied, the blush becoming more pronounced. "With that peignoir you were wearing? And Susan's … uh …"

"Arse?" Susan finished with a laugh.

"Best one in the school," Pansy said sincerely, a slight twinkle in her eyes.

"I'm just digging myself deeper, aren't I?" he asked. He was answered by four amused nods.

"We love you anyway, Harry," Hermione giggled. He blinked at her. Giggling? From Hermione?

He dropped the silencing spell when they had finished their meal, and the five left the Great Hall to general silence, save the Hufflepuff tables friendly comments. "Told you they'd trust me," Susan said.

"I appreciate it more than I can say," Harry said sincerely. "Nice to know who'll speak in my honour when this is all finished."

"I'm sorry that I'm even a member of Gryffindor," Hermione said, making no effort to lower her voice. "They go off on honour and the like, and then dishonour one of their own based on mere rumours."

"What would you know about honour, Granger?" Seamus Finnegan asked.

She smiled, a particularly nasty one at that. "A great deal more than you, Finnegan. Someday the truth will come out, and you'll be one of the ones claiming that you believed him all along. Before this year is out, the rest of you … things … will be begging for his forgiveness. I, for one, am going to suggest to him that you earn it before he gives it. After all, look how the more feminine Weasley treated him after betraying him in fourth year."

"I did no such thing!" Ginny bellowed as she came up from behind to join the growing crowd.

"Did I use your name, Ginevra?" Hermione asked coldly. "I was referring to the one I made the mistake of dating. You certainly have bigger balls than he does. You waited until this year to betray him."

"Oh, telling him to get lost after he fucked the cow behind you is betraying him?" Ginny snarled.

"No, believing that he did what you just said was betraying him. I am so waiting for Bill and Charlie to look in those ledgers that they use in place of their consciences, because when they finally admit what they did, you'll realise what you threw away, and that you'll never have again. And they'll claim that they did it because they thought that they were protecting you." She leaned in and snarled at Ginny, "You're definitely a child of your worthless family, Weasley, and I hope you die alone, childless, and friendless at the age of three hundred, you valueless little bint." With that, she looked to the others, and in unison, the five stepped away from the crowd, which stared in surprise at the vehemence and language she had displayed. There was a roar from down the hallway, and a spell came flying toward them. Harry threw up a reflecting shield and was rewarded with Ginny's scream as the spell struck her. He spared a look back and saw her fighting off her own Bat Bogey Hex.

"Twenty points from Gryffindor for you fighting in the hallways, Miss Weasley," Harry called in a sprightly voice.

They made it back to the shared suite without incident, and sat down before they all burst into laughter at the blush Hermione had suddenly sprouted. "She may have deserved it, but I don't believe I said that in public," she winced. "What will they think of me? I'm the Head Girl!"

Susan caught her breath enough to say, "Hufflepuff will probably drop to their knees and worship you!" she gasped out before falling into peals of laughter again.

Finally, the laughter subsided, and Harry began to blush. "We need to talk about something, ladies, before we get to planning the prank. Now that I can see again without giving myself a headache, you need to get used to being clothed again."
Luna spoke before anyone else could. "Is this for your comfort or ours?"

"A little of both, to be honest. I'm a teenaged boy. How do you think I'm going to react to four beautiful women in my presence wearing little to nothing? I should not be treating the four of you like slabs of meat. I think it would be best if you wore a bit more."

"What if we're more comfortable that way?" Pansy asked him.

"Then I guess … damn, I just don't know. I want you to be comfortable in here, and I'm not sure that you can be with me walking out here and leering at you all the time. Besides, what about the talk around the school?"

"They can go fuck themselves," Susan said vehemently.

"Then I guess … damn, I just don't know. I want you to be comfortable in here, and I'm not sure that you can be with me walking out here and leering at you all the time. Besides, what about the talk around the school?"

"They can go fuck themselves," Susan said vehemently.

"I think that's physically impossible," Luna said dreamily.

Susan smiled. "You know what I mean, Luna. The ones who mean anything will trust the truth, and those who don't? Who cares?"

"Your aunt and her reputation, for one," Harry replied. "Would you put it past some of these people to go to the Daily Prophet?"

"I'll write her and explain. She'll likely show up to see for herself, mind you. I'm not ashamed, though. And with her on our side, which I'm sure we can manage, when the Prophet starts its stories, she can help out both us and Headmaster Dumbledore by making a statement in the paper."

"I'm still wary," he said, "but the decision is up to you four. I won't push."

The four looked at each other for a moment before Hermione said, "Get used to nudity, then. I'm comfortable when it's just the five of us, so I see no reason to change now that you can actually see the effect you have on the four of us."

He blinked for a moment. "Your funerals." He clapped his hands suddenly. "Okay, on to the prank. I've got a good idea - tell me what you think."

"I thought we had one already."

"We did," he responded, "but there was too much to go wrong with it. Try this one on for size -"

A few minutes later, the five of them were roaring with laughter.

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They waited another week. Revenge, in this case, was a dish best served luke-warm - cold enough that brains would need to be wracked to remember why it would be done, but not so cold as to make people think that they were holding a grudge. They were, but that was no reason to actually be obvious about it.

The Wednesday of the prank arrived, and the quintet sat quietly at their table, eating. The Gryffindors began to come into the Hall by ones and twos. It took a while for anyone to notice this early in the morning, but finally the air was split by gasps and titters. The five looked up to see what might be causing the disturbance, and burst out laughing. The entire Gryffindor contingent from fourth to seventh year, which was continually growing as they came into the room, was completely naked. The Gryffindors looked up and scowled at the five and then returned to their breakfasts.

It was when Lavender and Parvati made it into the Great Hall following Ron and Ginny that all hell broke loose, as well as a few people not from Godric's namesake house showing that they had learned some lessons from Colin Creevey. Flashes from wizarding cameras went off like mad, and the girls jumped in surprise. "What are you all on about?"

"It's so sweet," Harry said. "So sure of your love that you tattooed each other's name in a heart on your arse. Explains why no dates in the last few years, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Susan answered. "Leaves a few questions to be answered, though. First off, why are they hiding it? It's not like anyone gives a damn about sexual orientation. Second, and I guess third, are why did they walk into the Great Hall naked, and why aren't the teachers doing anything about it?" She looked up at the Head Table.

McGonagall spoke up, thoroughly confused. "I see everyone in this room as fully clothed." The rest of the teachers nodded their agreement, although the Potions professor seemed to have the beginnings of a smirk on his face.

"Well, from the way the cameras went off," Harry said, "I'd say that the rest of the students see what I see - a table of Gryffindor students that are wearing something between zero and nothing." A quick survey of the room showed agreement with Harry and the rest of the quintet.

"Well, from the way the cameras went off," Harry said, "I'd say that the rest of the students see what I see - a table of Gryffindor students that are wearing something between zero and nothing." A quick survey of the room showed agreement with Harry and the rest of the quintet.

Harry stood and walked to the table. "I know you guys don't like me," he said to a fourth year who'd never actually bothered him except by toeing the Gryffindor 'party line', "but will you trust me this far?" he asked as he removed his own robe and handed it to the girl. She smiled nervously and covered herself with the robe - which promptly disappeared.

"Well, there goes a perfectly good robe," said Ernie MacMillan. The girl looked down, puzzled, and then looked up at Harry.

"It disappeared, at least from my point of view. I take it that you can still see it?" Harry asked, studiously looking not quite at the girl, who nodded and made the motions of removing a robe. When she was done, Harry's robe was in her hands.

"Looks to be a proximity effect," Terry Boot said. "There's Harry's robe again. Good spell work, whoever it was."
Harry put his robe back on. "Sorry 'bout that," he shrugged and turned to walk back to his own table.

"Sticks with the person, too," MacMillan said. "Aimed at the Gryffs then."

"Bravo, then," someone from the Slytherin shouted. "Teach 'em a lesson!"

"And show us that maybe Potter wasn't so crazy when he screwed the Weasel girl," Malfoy drawled. "Looking good, Red."

Ginny stood and levelled her wand at Malfoy. "Keep it up, Malfoy, and I can promise you that the line will die with you," she snarled.

Harry should have, but couldn't stop himself. "That's a familiar threat." He suddenly found himself deflecting a hex, which turned out to be Ginny's infamous Bat Bogey hex when it still managed to strike Malfoy.

"Twenty points from Gryffindor!" McGonagall yelled. "And a detention with me tonight, Miss Weasley!"

"This is your fault," she growled at Harry.

"Isn't it all my fault?" he quipped. "Isn't it my fault your brothers decided to lie to you? Isn't it my fault that you believed them? Isn't it my fault that except for the twins, your entire family proved to be worthless, back-stabbing worms?" He turned and headed back to his table, knowing that she was fuming.

"Can a worm even back-stab?" Luna asked. "They have no hands." Harry snorted.

"You really wanted to get that off your chest in public, didn't you?" Hermione asked softly. "Let some in the student body know that there is a second side to the story?"

"Not that any will listen, but yeah," Harry answered her.
Neville faced the portrait that led to the rooms that Harry and the four girls shared. "Coming in, dear?" asked the woman in the painting.

"Building my courage up," Neville answered honestly. "I need to face those people and give them an apology for something, and it's not easy." The painting nodded in understanding and smiled at him. Finally, he took a deep breath and knocked on the edge of the painting. The door opened to find Susan Bones in a blouse that seemed to hug her figure, and he tried not to react to the dark circles he could see through the thin material that made her bra-less state noticeable. Taking another deep breath, he asked, "May I speak with the five of you?" he asked softly.

He was soon seated on the couch, eyes bugging slightly as he saw Luna sitting in her underwear as she studied, unconcerned at his entry. "Oh, hello Neville," she said before returning to her book. She picked up a quill and made notes about something, while he readjusted himself somewhat, trying to be unobtrusive about it. "Thank you for the compliment," she said softly.

"You're welcome?" he strangled out.

"Neville," Hermione said as she, Pansy and Harry came out of Harry's room carrying various books. "These should do us for the research, Susan. If we need more, we can ask for the headmaster's help." She looked back to Neville. "What brings you here?"

"Honestly," Neville replied. "I don't care if the rest of Gryffindor Tower ostracises me, but I need to find out what's happening. I trusted them when they told me about what happened over this summer, but that explosion of Harry's in the Great Hall the other day got me thinking. He's not a terribly good actor in my knowledge, so his rant at Ginny, and Ron by extension, was real. So I thought a little harder about it, and I know both you and Susan well enough that it got me bothered." He paused. "I've been wrong to listen to them all this time. I should have known better. Harry seeing two girls at the same time? If it was going to happen at all, it would be up front, and he'd be the envy of every single guy around, because it would likely become a threesome, because they'd be that close."

"That could be wishful thinking," Susan said.

"This is Harry we're talking about. If he gives his heart to someone or to some cause, he puts his whole heart into it, and the girls likely would end up together just because they'd want to make Harry happy, because seeing one girl and then the other would make him feel like he was cheating, even if he knew that both girls knew and didn't care. He'd never say it, but he'd feel it.

He scowled. "So I turned around and believed that the same Harry I've known all these years would cheat on Ginny. Really sitting and thinking about it, the only way that would work is if he was under someone else's control, which removes the culpability from him, since he's being forced. So if I'm honest with myself, I ruined a six year friendship because I'm attracted to his ex-girlfriend." He continued with a self-deprecatingly sarcastic voice, as if quoting someone, "Maybe she'll notice me if I believe her."

"So why are you here?" Luna asked.

"To apologise to Harry, and to tell him I'll support him. I may have lost his friendship and trust, but I'll someday be worthy of his respect."

"You are," Neville, said, stepping from his room with Pansy, who was carrying her Charms text. "You show the same courage that you showed at the end of first year when you stood up to Ron, Hermione and me. And to face someone you feel you've done something to and admit you're wrong?" He stepped forward with a smile and held out his hand. "Thank you."

Neville took his hand. "I don't deserve your forgiveness, so I won't ask for it, but I thank you for at least letting me tell you I was wrong. I'll leave you five to your studying now." He tried to turn, but Harry wouldn't release him.

"Well, Neville, I hate to tell you this, but you not only have my friendship still, as well as my trust, or else I'd not have suggested you for the Prefect position, but you have my respect. And my forgiveness. You've owned up to something, and faced me. I can deal with you. Easily."

Neville smiled widely. "Thank you." He turned to Pansy. "I owe you an apology too, Miss Parkinson. Harry considers you a friend. Now that I've got my head out of my arse, I remember what that really means. I wrongly blamed you, even more so than I wrongly blamed him, if that's possible, by assuming that you would do that at all." He bowed from the waist. "I'm sorry, as if that means anything."

"It does," Pansy replied. "I won't deny that it hurt, but I have to admit that I am Slytherin, and acted like one. Hell, even my friendship with Harry flows from that - I'm saving my own life, and that of my family by being his friend." Her eyes twinkled. "Plus I get to stay in this suite of rooms with him and say that I lived with the great Harry Potter, the Man Who'll Kick Riddle's Arse. And call me Pansy. My friends do."

Harry broke in with a smile. "I want my epitaph to read - 'I didn't know that banana peel was there' or something like that, not something referring to how I defeated some idiot who has too much power and not enough sense." He looked at Neville seriously. "I won't deny that I'm... well, the girls have already heard this. I am both blessed and cursed to live with four beautiful women. The blessing is that they're all beautiful and like me. The curse is that they're all very beautiful and like me."

"There are guys in the school who'd kill to be in your position, you know," Neville said with a smile.

"They think so," Harry said. "But Luna is more dressed now than some times that I come in here to study. The day I regained my sight I almost died of blood loss to the brain, because Susan was the most dressed girl in here, in a tank top and knickers - and I walked out the door to see her bending over for something."
Harry spoke up. "And despite what the Weasleys insist on passing around the school, there are still virgins in this suite of rooms. None of us have been in his bed - and I will be the first to say that it's not for lack of trying."

Neville was aroused by Harry's description of their occasional mode of dress (or undress, as the case might be, especially since Susan was excellent eye candy) but he was intrigued to see Harry's eyes widen in surprise at Pansy's admission, and then a wince of pain. Suddenly, everything became clear to him. Harry was developing feelings for these girls, and at least one of them was in love with him - apparently Pansy, and this was news to Harry. "I'll bet that he doesn't trust himself now thanks to the Weasleys."

"Harry, I will state here, before you all, that I intend to defend you to Gryffindor Tower. You deserve no less than that. I will face the slings and arrows of their anger and disgust at my turning traitor on them."

"Don't go looking for it," Harry said. "Just do what you want to when the conversation turns to our accommodations or some such."

Hermione laughed. "Harry, this is Neville. He'll make sure the conversation turns that way."

"You know me so well," Neville laughed. "I do need to return to my duties, though. I just needed to make sure that I came to apologise to you. Actually, I need to apologise to the three of you as well," he said, looking at the other three girls. By tarring Harry and Pansy, we also tar the three of you with the same brush."

"I forgive you," Susan said, and I'll bet that they do as well." Luna looked up and nodded, smiling, and Hermione just walked over and hugged him.

"If Harry and the others don't mind, you could come and study with us occasionally," Pansy said. "You'd need to get used to our varying states of undress, but I'm not going to complain if one of Harry's real friends chooses to join us for studying."

Harry spoke up. "Plus it gives you somewhere to leave your homework so that the Gryffies don't destroy it on you once you start defending us."

Quidditch practice finally began, and the team made it quite clear to Harry that he was unwelcome during their first practice. After the third Bludger almost hit him when there was no reason for it to be in his part of the sky, he simply landed, packed things up, and left. After getting dressed, he quietly informed McGonagall that he would not be playing Quidditch this final year, since Gryffindor had made it quite clear that the team would not work as a well-oiled machine with him on it. While he found the sport fun, it was really the flying that he enjoyed, and he knew that there was no way that they could take that away from him. "I'm sorry about the Cup, but I seriously doubt that they'll be good enough to win."

He sighed. "By the way, I'm stating this now. Unless an apology comes to me before they officially remove me from the team, I will not rejoin, even if Bill and Charlie show up the very next day and admit their wrongdoing."

"I am sorry that you feel this way, Mister Potter," she said in her best school-teacher voice, "but I understand your decision." She relaxed and said, "As much as I act as if the Cup is all-important, I support you in this, Harry. Currently I'm angry enough with my own House that I'd likely take points from them for the same reasons that Severus would." Harry's eyebrows rose at that. "I won't, but now you understand me, I think." He nodded with a slight smile.

She paused and when she spoke again, it was softer still. "If I overstep my bounds, please forgive me Harry, because I do it for the best of reasons. Be careful with the young ladies that you share the suite with. I think that all four of them are in love with you." "I know they are," he said sadly. "The problem is how I feel about them. If it weren't for the fact that I felt exactly this way about Ginny at one point, I'd call it love. But I can't feel that for four girls, so it must be just teenaged lust. We've already written to Amelia Bones to talk to her about the situation, and she'll likely visit at some point to see what is happening. I won't hurt them intentionally, but I can't let them continue to think that they're in love with me, when I can't return their feelings. I think I do, but I know better, so I refuse their advances." He winced. "Please don't take points. There have been some conversations about being 'friends with benefits', if you understand my meaning. I haven't taken any of them up on it, because they might think that I'm finally returning their feelings. Ginny taught me quite well that what I'm feeling is lust, and nothing more." He shrugged. "Well, I have studying to do. My grades should be much higher this final year, if only because I won't have Quidditch interfering with my studying." He left the office, and Albus stepped from the side room.

"Were it not that I need them so much in the Order, I would remove the entire family save the twins," he said sadly. "They have damaged that young man beyond anything I have ever seen Riddle do. I may have done my own damage to him, but I have worked to mend that rift, and believe that we have made excellent inroads toward it. What he feels for the ladies is truly love - I can sense that in the sorrow he feels in his belief that it is not love."

"What do we do?" Minerva asked.

"Support him as best we can, and make our willingness to speak to him on any matters evident to him. Beyond that, I do not honestly know what can be done. I am continuing to work on William and Charles. William is closest to breaking, but Charles is as stubborn as his mother. Someday the truth will out, however."

"It will never be soon enough," Minerva responded. "To think that he once thought of them as family. They aren't worthy of the title."

"They are too certain of the truthfulness of their members, and act as they always do - with not enough information. They will certainly feel sorrow for their actions when this has played out, but it will be too late for them ever to regain his trust as completely as they once had it."
The month of October came in quietly, unless you counted the screaming from the Gryffindor Quidditch team. Harry had been ejected from the team with cries of ‘irreconcilable differences’ as their reasoning. This hadn’t been enough to make them scream, however. Where their loud wails came from was discovering that Harry was now the unofficial coach for the Hufflepuff team’s Seeker. They attempted to prevent this, but it was pointed out to them that since he was not on any Quidditch team, his time was his own, and if he chose to offer a friend the fruits of his knowledge of the sport, then he was more than able to, and there were no school rules preventing such. In fact, there were actually no rules preventing him from having done it while still a member of the team.

Hufflepuff's Seeker improved mightily under Harry's tutelage, and Minerva McGonagall shook her head. "I'll be sorry to lose the Cup this year, but at least I'll have lost it to a team that Harry was teaching," she quietly said to Pomona Sprout one day in the teachers lounge.

"I simply wonder how the Weasley family could be so … I don't know what the word is that I'm looking for is -"

"Stupid?" Minerva supplied acidly.

"Not the one I was looking for, and one you will never hear me claim in public …"

"… Nor I," Minerva admitted.

"… but I have to admit that the word does fit. I don't know the boy as well as they do, and I know that he wouldn't do such a thing. To think that he would be with Ginevra and then supposedly sleep with Miss Parkinson? The two are friends, and I've been fairly certain since about May that she would like more, but Mister Potter is not the type to sleep around."

"You know that, your House knows that, and even Severus Snape admits that the Weasleys are doing Harry dirty. He and Harry are finally making peace with one another because of this." Minerva scowled. "You never heard me say this, but with my House's tendency to follow A Cause, I'm surprised that more of them don't follow You Know Who."

"I never heard you say that," Pomona repeated as she smiled. "But I agree."

"Well, there is nothing we can do about what is already done," Minerva said, "but we can at least try to mitigate the damage. I'll be out there on your game days cheering on your team."

"Unless it's Gryffindor we're playing," Pomona laughed.

"Well -" McGonagall smiled in answer.

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Pressure for a certain conversation between Hermione and Pansy had been building since the school year had begun, and they were in the post-conversational afterglow when Harry returned to the suite on October 20. Despite the fact that their activities were fairly obvious since Hermione's bra had unexplainably gotten fifteen feet from the couch, Harry looked at them, grunted something that sounded like it might be positive, and walked into his room. His movements seemed somewhat painful. They made no effort to dress. They were on their feet in an instant and at his door.

"Harry, we're coming in," Pansy said before she opened the door.

The girls gasped as they saw his back disappear under his robes. It looked raw. "Who do we have to kill?" Pansy asked, and Hermione realised that her new lover wasn't joking. **Someone has hurt her … well, our Harry, and I pity the one who did it.**

"I can't tell you," he said simply, and turned to face them. "Congratulations, by the way. I've been wondering for about a week or so when you were going to admit it to each other. Think I first realised it the day I got my sight back - your foot was in Pansy's lap, and her nipples were so hard that they had to have hurt."

"They did," Pansy said softly. "At least I finally got her to kiss them and make them feel better," she added in a voice that should have had Harry trying to tear through his loose-fitting robes.

Hermione's eyebrows rose at his lack of a reaction. "Take off that robe right now and lie down on the bed, Harry. We're dealing with your wounds." When he didn't move, she added, "Don't make me Stupefy you. You're in pain, and we want to help you."

"You would, wouldn't you? You'd Stupefy me and take me to Madam Pomfrey." It was not a question. At the serious nod from both ladies, he said, "Unless you swear to me not to bring the teachers in on this, I will fight you every step of the way."

"Harry, if you've been attacked …" Hermione began to say.

"Swear it!" he replied harshly.

"On one condition," Pansy said. "You tell us who did this to you."

"I can't. Not won't - can't."

"We'll find out, you know," Hermione told him. "Four women who love you very much and who don't want to see you hurt again are not going to take this lying down."

"Don't do this!" he barked. "I have my reasons!"

"So do we," Pansy said softly. "Stupefy. "
Harry awoke in the Hospital Wing. Dumbledore was sitting next to the bed. "Ah, Harry, you're awake. We need to talk."

"Why? I can't tell you anything about the attack."

"I don't know what hold they think they have over you, but I will not simply sit back and permit any of my students to be sexually assaulted."

"You'll have to, sir. I'm not going to take Veritaserum, not that it would do any good, since all that it is, is basically a liquid Imperius, and we know how effective that is on me. I've learned enough Occlumency to have shields up at all times, and I'd recognise even your attempts to get into my head."

"Whom are you protecting? Is it one of the Weasleys, perhaps?"

Harry snorted. "If that were the case, you'd know everything about it. I can't tell you what happened, though."

"There is nothing to be ashamed of, Harry. It wasn't your fault."

"I know that, sir. I will reiterate that I can't tell you what happened, however."

Dumbledore sighed. "When you feel the desire to speak to me about this, my door will be open. At any time of day. Until then, however, I understand that there are four ladies very worried about you out here."

The curtain parted as Dumbledore dropped a Silence that Harry hadn't even known was there. Outside stood all four of his suite-mates, Pansy and Hermione looking the most worried. For the first time Harry could remember other than her grandfather's death, Pansy was close to crying. "Hello, ladies," he said as brightly as he could muster. "Are you here to sneak me out from beneath Madam Pomfrey's watchful eyes?"

"No," Poppy said with a smile as she stepped out from behind him. "They're here to walk my favourite patient back to his quarters. Your physical wounds have healed, and holding you overnight would solve nothing. I believe these ladies can help you with your psychic trauma." She frowned deeply. "I would be tempted to forget my oaths if I ever discover who did this to you."

"Please don't," Harry said softly. "It's not worth the psychic trauma you'd put yourself through for forgoing them, even if only for a while." He stood and walked the few steps to the girls. "I'll come back tomorrow if you'd like, Madam Pomfrey." At the shake of her head, he looked at his suite-mates and said, "Shall we?"

At breakfast the next day, Harry sat quietly at the table. He was no longer in pain or experiencing tenderness, but he was certainly not as cheerful as he had been just the day before. He remained sullen and sniped at people all day.

It was worse the next day when photographs began to circulate the school. The Slytherin and Gryffindor tables were laughing the loudest, while the Ravenclaws were split between disgust and laughter, the line at that table extremely strongly demarcated. Hufflepuff, on the other hand, to a person looked ready to kill as the photos circulated. They were all of Harry in compromising positions, often with tears of shame and sometimes pain in his eyes.

Luna scowled and growled "Accio photos!" As the offensive photographs flew toward her, the other three girls fired of Incendio's that were perhaps stronger than they had intended, as the photos burned white-hot.

Neville scowled at the rest of his House and stood. "You make me ashamed to be a Gryffindor," he said before walking proudly to Harry's table. "May I be permitted to join you?"

Harry simply nodded as he stood. "It's not the company, Neville. I've no appetite." Harry walked away from the table, and the girls joined him, as did Neville.

As they passed the Gryffindor table, Dean snarled, "Maybe now you can understand what you did to Ginny, you arsehole."

The look that the five people with Harry gave Dean caused the young black man to back away carefully from them. Ginny jumped in their way. "He deserved it, after the way he treats people! I'm glad it happened!"

The sound of the back of Hermione's hand striking the redhead's cheek echoed through the Hall. A small stream of blood flew, since it was the hand wearing the ring that Harry had originally intended as Ginny's promise ring. "Ginevra Molly Weasley, any possibility of repairing our friendship is now gone. When your lying brothers finally admit that they broke your relationship with Harry because they didn't like the idea of you growing up, you'll regret everything you've said since the twelfth of August, and you'll not be able to retract it. And I'll not forgive."

Harry was still facing away from the group when he suddenly said, "Ronald Weasley, if you don't put that wand away, I will shove it so far up your ass that you'll have to open your mouth to cast spells." The thing that shocked most in the Hall was that Harry had been correct - Ron had been in the process of drawing his wand to curse Hermione for striking Ginny. Ron vacillated for a few moments before putting his wand away, and the sextet left the Great Hall.
The next few days were tense around the school. The teachers were watching Harry carefully. He had a tendency to snap angrily at people, and it luckily had not gotten physical - yet. They wished to keep it that way.

He managed to drive Pansy to tears on the twenty-ninth of October, barking at her about some Arithmantic problem he was working on while she quietly gossiped with the other girls. Before the other girls could comment on it, he stood, walked over to his door and punched it as hard as he possibly could, actually cracking the large oak door, and breaking his hand. "I deserve it," they heard him murmur angrily. "If I can make her cry for no good reason, then I deserve what he does to me." He looked down to his left hand and then turned to the other girls. "Well, time to go see Madam Pomfrey, and listen to her lecture me about breaking things." He was out the door before they could react.

By the time that they caught up with him, he was almost to the hospital wing. "Harry, what did you mean by that comment?" Hermione asked.

"I can't tell you that, Hermione. You know that. I know I've said it before."

"Why can't you tell us?"

"I can't tell you that either," he said as he entered Madam Pomfrey's demesnes.

"Good heavens, Mister Potter. What happened to your hand?" the woman asked as she bustled over to Harry.

"Got into a fight with an oak door and lost. Don't worry, though - I had it coming to me."

"You did not!" Pansy barked out as she came running into the room. "Just because my emotions are closer to the surface this time of the month does not mean you have to break your door. I repaired it, by the way."

"I was nasty enough to you that I made you cry, Pansy. You don't do that to the people you love." He shook his head.

"I've discovered," Luna broke in suddenly, "that if I can't talk about a problem for some reason, writing about it seems to help me." She put her head back down into the book she seemed always to carry with her this year.

Madam Pomfrey was just finishing up repairing his hand when his head shot up. He grabbed his wand and created a biro and a sheet of Muggle writing paper, and scribbled something on it. For the first time since the day that Pansy and Hermione had become lovers, they saw Harry with a grin. He dropped the items on the bed and leapt to his feet, pulling Luna into a hug, making her drop the book. "You are truly worthy of being a Ravenclaw!" he said joyfully. "Thank you!"

He surprised them all by kissing her on the lips then. It was obviously intended to be a 'thank you' kiss, but before he could disengage, her arms flew around him and she was returning it with no little passion. They all heard him moan, and suddenly he was returning her passion with his own, and were rather surprised to see his hands slide down to gently grasp her rear end. Before anyone could say anything about it, though, he had disengaged himself from her and staggered backwards. "My God, I am so sorry, Luna, I didn't mean to … I wasn't … oh gods, forcing myself on you - I … oh my God, what have I become?"

Pansy walked over to him after setting down the sheet that he had created. "Someone who has been scarred by a disgusting little animal. Someone who has been scarred enough that he fears that real passion is a forerunner of what was done to him." She put her hands on his cheeks gently and said, "I read your note, Harry, and this is my response." He squeezed his eyes shut, expecting to be slapped, but was surprised when she felt her lips brush his. He opened his mouth to speak, and was surprised to feel her press closer and run her tongue into his open mouth. Before he could react, she had disengaged, hugging him tightly. "I know you'll never return the feelings after what The Bitch did to you," she whispered, "but I love you, Harry. I read what he did, and I still love you." She disengaged and stepped away.

Susan and Hermione were looking over the short note, and they both walked to him and kissed him gently. "It's not your fault," Susan said. He gritted his teeth. "I can't say what I want to."

"Then write it," Hermione said simply. "Let us know. We'll find a way to put a stop to this."

"You have convinced him to speak?" came the Headmaster's voice. "I heard of the situation and came at once."

"No, sir," Pansy said. "He literally can't talk about it. Luna gave him a suggestion so good that she got a serious fondle out of it."

Harry was looking worried at the statement, but Luna came over and smiled. "I certainly will attempt to come up with equally good ideas if that is your method of thanking me," she said. Kissing his cheek, she added in a whisper, "Next time let me get my clothes off first."

He looked stunned. "Luna, I forced myself on you."

"No you didn't, more's the pity," she said, blushing slightly. "Even with the Headmaster here, I will say that I wish you hadn't stopped. Part of me wishes that we were on one of these beds earning ourselves a detention for improper activities. One of my fantasies involves pretend non-consensual, but only with those in this room. Minus the headmaster and Madam Pomfrey, of course," she said, the blush deepening. "If anyone was forcing anything, it was me taking the chaste kiss you were giving me and forcing my affections on you. Was I wrong?"

He scowled. "No, you weren't. But my hands …"
"...were nowhere that I did not wish them to be. If you hadn't broken free when you did, I was likely to have wrapped my legs around your waist."

She looked him in the eye. "I am a virgin, Harry. At this moment in time, it is my most fervent hope to be relieved of that condition. By you." She looked to the Headmaster. "Full contraceptive protocols in place, of course, sir."

"You make it sound like a mission, Luna," Susan giggled.

"It is a mission," Luna said seriously. "I wish to be made love to by the man I am in love with."

Harry was now shaking his head in horror. "No, you don't know what I am - you don't want to do that, Luna. I won't let you degrade yourself like that."

They heard Pansy inhale. "You'll never be able to prove it, Headmaster, but don't be surprised when the Malfoy line ends."

Hermione looked at Pansy, and then at Dumbledore, and then back at Pansy. "Besides, you'll have an alibi." She looked back to Dumbledore. "No matter what." He snapped the paper at Dumbledore, who read it, his eyes going cold at the four words written there - 'Draco Malfoy raped me.'

"I fear that some day I shall require Madam Pomfrey here to check my hearing. It seems to vanish on me at the most inopportune moments." He gave the group a knowing look, before saying, "Unfortunately, for legal purposes, Harry's written statement would not be enough. Even a Pensieve memory of the incident would not guarantee the success of proceedings against Mister Malfoy. I admit to being at a loss to figure how to prove this."

"I believe you, Harry. I simply wish to place this before the Board of Governors and the Courts in such a way as to make it impossible for them to buy his way back in. I meant what I said. I will not have that in this school. Neither will I have them throwing Galleons around to protect him."

"What do we do now?" Hermione asked.

"We?" Harry asked. "How did this become a group project?"

"By you punching a door hard enough to break it and cryptically saying that you deserved what he was doing to you," Susan said. "By being wonderful enough that the four of us fell in love with you."

"I'm not going to let you put yourselves in danger," he said dangerously.

Pansy stalked back over to him, her face filled with a look that actually drove Harry backwards until he was forced to sit by backing into a bed. "Harry James Potter, we are going to help you, and there is nothing you can do to stop it. I may officially be a Slytherin, but seeing what kind of a person you are has … you … damn you, you made me a Gryffindor!" she finished with a yell, and then suddenly snorted out a laugh. "I said it before. I am in love with you, knowing that the feeling will never be returned. I will willingly face the Kiss for you, if I thought it would give you a chance to defeat Tom."

"We are going to put our heads together on this and figure out a way to get incontrovertible proof of what that disgusting little rodent did to you, and I'll castrate him before he can leave."

"Oh dear, there goes my hearing again," Albus murmured to quiet chuckles.

Harry looked at them for a long moment before asking, "Why? I'm damaged goods. I'm … uhng … I can't even say it …"

Pansy looked at him for a long moment, closed her eyes and bit her lower lip. It was obvious that she was thinking deeply, and the room was silent, for fear that she might lose the train of thought. Her eyes suddenly snapped open. "You're doing this to protect us. He's doing this and told you that you couldn't stop him from getting us. You agreed to let him have you if he swore that you were the only one in school to be touched. He agreed if you promised not to tell anyone."

"How - not quite, but … how?"

"He was my lover for five and a half years, Harry. I use the term loosely, mind you. Our first times were effectively rape, so I know how the little bastard thinks. There isn't an orifice I have that he hasn't violated at least once."

Harry saw red for a moment, and then saw nothing for a short time.

When he was finally awakened, he found Pansy sitting by his bed with suspiciously wet eyes. "What did I do wrong, Pansy? Why are you crying?"

"You four were ready to kill him right now, no questions asked. We had to Stupefy you to keep you from killing him with your bare hands. Thank you."

"But why are you crying?"

"I've never been loved like that by anyone but my parents." She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. "Thank you."

"You're one of my best friends, Pansy. I am not about to let you be raped again by that … that … thing that rules Slytherin with an iron fist. He will die first."

Susan chuckled. "Should that have been 'I will die first'?"

"You can if you want, but I'd rather it be him. Why should I be the one to suffer because he's an asshole?" Harry said with a straight face. His
mouth betrayed the amusement he was beginning to feel, however, since the corners of his mouth quirked upwards slightly.

"In all seriousness, however," Hermione interrupted, "you need to know that we are not going to simply sit by and let Malfoy do this to you any more than you would let him do it to us. We are going to work out a method of proving that it was him, and do so without you being subjected to him again."

"But …"

Pansy laughed suddenly. "He swore an Oath that he’d not let us come to harm, didn’t he?"

Harry found himself unable to answer. He grabbed the paper and biro and scribbled a quick ‘Yes’ to answer her.

She grinned widely. "Polyjuice Potion. I take your place and let him do what he’s going to. If there was no punishment stated in the Oath, then anything could happen, but it will be obvious, and then you’ll be able to talk about it, because the Oath will be null and void."

"No," Harry said in a voice that brooked no argument. "You will not be subjecting yourself to another rape, and that’s final."

She blinked at him for a moment. "Why not?" she finally asked, her voice holding an interesting tone.

"I told you already. You’re my friend. My other friends made it obvious what their friendship really means."

"And as your friend, I choose to place myself in harm’s way to keep the man I love from being hurt again."

"And I won’t allow it," he said hotly.

"Why not? I don’t buy your reasoning about friendship. A person doesn’t put himself in such an untenable position for someone who’s just a friend," she retorted.

"Sure you do," he replied, puzzled.

"Would you willingly have put yourself in this position for Neville? Or Hannah Abbot?" Susan asked softly. He could only frown. "I thought so," she finished.

"Could someone please explain this ‘ah-ha’ moment you all seem to be having?" Harry asked with some mounting annoyance.

"I know that you may not accept this from me, Harry, given our past history," Dumbledore said with a smile, "but this is truly something that can not be explained. You must come to it in your own time. Were you simply to be told, you would argue and fight the inescapable conclusion."

Harry looked sharply at the headmaster, but quickly realised that the man was telling him the complete truth. "Well then," he finally said, "I’m going to surprise everyone and act like an adult, and accept your answer. I’ll know someday what you’re talking about."

He stood straighter. "We now have to figure out how to get the evidence we need to eject the ferret from the school, without anyone else being hurt in the process."
Warning: While I kept the descriptives to a barest minimum, there is a description in here of a rape. You have been warned.

"Tell me again why it needs to be you," Hermione requested, holding Pansy tightly. The one-time Slytherin girl could feel the brunette's shivering and the pounding of the poor girl's heart.

"Because I know Draco," she replied simply. "And more importantly, I've been raped by him before. You'd be doing it for the first time and giving first time reactions to his ... ahem ... ministrations. Harry is past that now and reacts far differently. I won't be giving first time reactions either."

She smiled. "Besides, I would die for any of you now. Sexual abuse is nothing, especially since I'll be able to testify in court as to what will happen."

"Sexual abuse is not nothing!" Hermione cried into Pansy's hair as pulled the black-haired beauty closer.

Pansy held the woman who somehow had come to mean so much to her in these past months and let her cry for a moment before pulling away slightly and pulling Hermione's face upward. "I understand what you're saying, and I agree with you." She grinned evily. "But this is Draco and his equipment, not to mention Crabbe and Goyle. Trust me, it's nothing." Hermione giggled quietly and then sniffed. "In honesty, I don't want to do this, but if it weren't me, you'd be offering yourself up for this, wouldn't you?" Hermione blushed prettily in response. "Uh-huh. I'm best suited for this mission, both in foreknowledge and revenge capabilities."

She leaned forward slightly and let her open lips brush the brunette's. "I love you very much, do you know that? I never thought I'd feel that way for a girl, and now there're three of you that make my heart pound." She let her hands slip down and caress Hermione's rear end as she pressed her open lips against Hermione's mouth. Pansy gently sliding her tongue along the pretty Gryffindor's lips, which opened to allow entry.

When they finally broke, breathing heavily, Hermione panted, "Ginny Weasley and I experimented a few times, but I never thought I'd reach a point where I wanted to spend the rest of my life with a female lover. Now there are three." She blushed prettily. "One especially."

Pansy laughed, a happy, delightful sound. "When this is done, the four of us need to tie Harry down and make him see reason. He loves us all, it's just that the Weasel broke him."

The door opened to show a chuckling Harry. He wasn't completely back to his normal self, but finding that his four roommates did not hate him or pity him for what he had been going through had helped him a great deal. "I think staying further away from Ron Weasley than usual is a good idea for the next few days," he said.

"What did you do?" Susan asked as she walked out of Luna's room clad in naught but a tired and satisfied smile.

"Well, the Weasley twins developed a product - quite juvenile, but fun nonetheless - that basically gives you a literal hot-seat when you, umm, when you pass gas. They discovered by accident that the more gas that passes, the higher the likelihood of actual flames happening. Well, I managed to coat all of his trousers and pants with the stuff. And I'm sending everyone in the school free candy, including a few Wheezes. No word who it's really from, though, obviously. And all but one of the Wheeze packages are labelled as such. Now, I've arranged that the Gryffindors are getting a new one called Flatulence Fudge. Knowing Ron ..."

"I wonder how far out the flames will shoot," Hermione said around a giggle.

"The way he eats?" Susan asked. "Probably from the doors of the Great Hall to the Head Table!"

"Should someone gift him with a pair of roller skates?" Harry wondered with a chuckle.

Hermione paused and then began to giggle again as she imagined the resulting scene. Harry's eyes fell on an envelope on one of the tables, and his face fell. "Damn. I hate owl deliveries sometimes." He sighed. "Well, looks like that time again," he said, no humour in his voice. As he reached over to pick up the letter, his eyes widened just before he fell to the floor unconscious.

Hermione and Pansy put their wands away and walked over to Harry. "I'll put him in bed," Hermione said. "You take a hair or two and put it in the Polyjuice."

"I'm still not asking where you got this from," Pansy stated as she gently took a single hair from Harry's head and then lovingly kissed his lips.

"Ask me no questions; I'll tell you no lies," Hermione responded.

"More importantly," Susan said with a grin, "she hasn't had the time to make up a really entertaining lie."

"Hey!" Hermione said in mock effrontery. "Who do you think I am, Fred or George?"

"No, you have much better curves than they do," Luna quipped. The others had learned that Luna had a very wicked sense of humour, and quite often the things she said that seemed oddest were for those with the wits to understand the joke behind her statements. (Crumple-horned Snorkacks not withstanding, of course.) She turned to Pansy. "Do be careful, darling. The five of us have a life to share someday, and we need all of us here. Draco Malfoy has a vicious streak in him."
"I know that you mean well by that, Luna, but as Harry would say, 'That's a no-brainer'. Even Gregory knows that."

"I understand," Luna replied, "but it's a Rule Three situation. Say it and be sure. Never assume."

"What are Rules One and Two?" Susan asked, mildly dreading the response.

"Rule One is 'Never drink and laugh at the same time,' and Two was 'Be careful around Nargles.' Easy to remember, really."

Pansy shook her head. "Someday I'll ask about the Nargles, but I don't have the time right now. She opened the envelope, looked at the note, and then looked at her watch. "I may be a little late, but I'll use us as an excuse." She added the hair to the potion and then drank it quickly.

The other girls watched as Pansy began the nauseating process of morphing into another human being, her skin bubbling and stretching weirdly as the potion took effect. They couldn't help but giggle slightly when it was over, however, with the sight of Harry Potter in bra and knickers before them, especially since Harry was a bit larger than Pansy. They found themselves impressed next as 'Harry' reacted to them all. "I decided to forego boxers," she said. "Give Dorko some ammunition for a moment or two."

Hermione walked over to 'Harry' and cast a spell. "By now, I'd imagine that Malfoy has stopped checking Harry for magic if he follows through with his general laziness. I can contact the Headmaster as soon as you leave, and trace you to your torture chamber. This spell will make sure the Marauder's Map reads you as Pansy."

"Good idea. It would be especially good if you could catch him in the act, but I'm willing to go under Veritaserum to prove that he actually did it."

"I'm waiting to see what happens if he tries to break the oath, or better, if he's successful," Susan said. "Actually no. That would be bad, because it meant that he actually hurt you."

Pansy shook her head and took off to the place Harry was to meet Draco after grabbing a small flask and pouring a small amount of Polyjuice into it, in case she needed to keep the façade going for more than an hour.

"You're running late, Potter," Malfoy smirked as 'Harry' came to a stop in front of him.

"The girls are suspicious. Considering I can't tell them why I'm leaving, I have to come up with something. So I'm running late. Let's just get this over with, okay?"

"Testy today, aren't we?" the blonde student sneered. "That's just earned you an extra special treatment. Seems that we've discovered some interesting uses for Engorgement Charms," he said with an evil smile.

They entered the empty classroom, and 'Harry' was quickly stripped. "Finally being smart enough to come prepared, I see," Malfoy said mockingly. Crabbe and Goyle bent the faux Gryffindor over a desk while Malfoy undressed and cast the modified Engorgio, followed by a lubrication spell.

The scream that Pansy released was not forced or faked. She felt a tearing sensation in her rectum and knew that Madam Pomfrey would be working overtime to fix her.

This was followed immediately by Draco screaming for a moment and then shakily pulling free. "What the hell did you do to me, you bastard?"

"I've got no idea what happened," came the response. "Not anything I did, and I'll swear to that."

"You and your damned oaths," Malfoy shuddered. "Crabbe, Goyle - you deal with him while I recover." Pansy found herself held down by rough and clumsy hands and then violated some more. This round did not last for very long as the door exploded inward. Malfoy was hit with a Bludgeoning Spell before he could even reach his wand, sending him into painful unconsciousness.

Crabbe and Goyle stood, staring stupidly at the scene in the doorway, treating everyone to the disgusting image of them nude. The two stared even more stupidly than was their norm as they saw the student they had been attacking standing in the doorway. They looked back down at the person on the desk, which was all the time that was needed for Harry to bull his way into the room and heave Crabbe up against the wall in an attempt to get at his duplicate.

"Pansy, why?" he asked.

"Needed to be done. Draco broke the Oath by not verifying that I was really you. You should be able to talk about it now."

"But you're hurt!" He looked at her more carefully and then grabbed her. To everyone's shock, he disappeared.

Hermione looked down at the Marauder's Map and frowned. "Pansy's in the Hospital Wing right now. I'll worry about how he got there in a minute. Right now..." she trailed off, turning toward Draco and the other two with menace in her eyes.

It was at that moment that Amelia Bones arrived, two Aurors in tow. "Susan, I'm here as you... May I inquire as to why there are three naked boys in this room?"
It's part of why I asked you here, Auntie. As we understand it, these three are the reason that Harry's been in the shape he's in. There was an Oath involved, which I believe Draco just broke.

Amelia looked at the group and saw the fury that the girls were barely holding in. She had trouble reading the Headmaster and the Heads of Household, but they all seemed equally furious. "Where are the other two of your group?" she asked.

"I don't know how," Hermione said, "but Harry grabbed Pansy and somehow disappeared to the Hospital Wing."

The entire group headed to the Hospital Wing after the three Slytherins were restrained and covered. Draco remained unconscious and was floated along by one of the Aurors.

By the time they reached the Wing, Harry was holding Pansy and rocking back and forth. Both of them were crying. "Why, Pansy? You could have died! Why?" was all he seemed to be able to say.

"Maybe now he'll admit it to himself," Hermione said with a sad smile.

"Mr. Potter?" Amelia Bones asked softly. "May I talk to you?"

Harry didn't hear her until she repeated her request. "Yes, Madame Bones?" He saw the gathered group, including the three attackers, and Hermione quickly Stunned him as rage came to his face.

"What was that for?" Amelia asked as she spun to Hermione.

Susan answered her. "If you want those three alive to stand trial she needed to do that. He was willing to be attacked by them on a regular basis, but his reaction to Pansy's attack … well, we might find pieces of them around the castle. Maybe."

Amelia turned to the Aurors. "Take them away from here and put them into secure holding facilities. If anyone other than myself comes to see them, they are not to be admitted. You will be on duty guarding them until you are relieved by me. Do not take the word of any Auror saying that I sent them to relieve you - I will do that in person only. I want these three checked out carefully, cataloguing all the injuries they may have, and any evidence - such as the blood on Mister Malfoy's nether regions."

The Aurors snapped to attention and quickly removed the three accused teens from the room.

Only then was Harry re-awakened. "Thank you, Hermione," he said after being told what happened. "I want them to stand trial for what they did to her."

"How about what they did to you?" Susan asked.

"Except for the first time, the others could be considered to be consensual, and I'm quite certain that the Malfoy lawyer will push that as hard as he can," Hermione started to say something, but he interrupted her before she could begin to speak. "I know it was under duress, but since I had agreed to it, a highly paid lawyer could conceivably convince people that it was consensual." He scowled. "If he doesn't get serious penalties from the criminal charges, then he deserves what he will get from me." He met Amelia Bones's eyes. "I give you a warning - no one hurts these four and gets away with it. I subjected myself to being Oathbound and being repeatedly raped in order to keep them safe. I will state here and now, in front of witnesses, that I am willing to kill to keep them safe."

"I agree to it, a highly paid lawyer could conceivably — " he started to say something, but he was interrupted again.

"How about what they did to you?" Amelia asked softly. "I do hate to interrupt, but since Mister Malfoy showed the magical signs of breaking an Oath, I have the suspicion that you will now be able to explain what you were unable to before." He frowned. "Please forgive me, Harry, for not realising what you were telling me when you informed me that you could not tell me what had happened. I was mistaking …"

"Sir, it was an honest mistake, and I'll admit that I was hoping that you'd make it. I don't hold it against you. Now, I assume you'd like to be made aware of what happened?"

Harry was heading back toward Gryffindor Tower when he felt a spell strike him, and he fell unconscious. He awoke in an unused classroom, tied face down onto a desk. "Ah good, he's awake," he heard, and looked up to see Malfoy grinning at him. "We've got you here to have a little fun with you, Potter."

As soon as Malfoy had finished saying this, he felt blinding pain in his … Oh God, are they … "No!" Harry screamed, which was answered by laughter. "Oh my God, no … no, no, no, no …" was all he chanted for a while as they took turns raping him. Crabbe decided to molest Harry's mouth, but Harry taught him otherwise, although it earned him a particularly violent retribution.

When the conquest was done, Malfoy smiled evilly at him. "The thing is, Potter, that only the Duffers are even willing to believe you, and what can they do? They're useless. That's why they're in that House! We are going to have so much fun going through the Mudblood, the traitor, Loony, and the redhead Duffer. There's not a thing you can do to stop us, either. Even if you warn them, we'll find a way to get them alone, and then we'll teach them about trusting you. We might even let Parkinson survive the experience. Probably not, though." He smirked at Harry. "And you can't even prove that we did anything." Harry felt several spells strike him, and all the wounds he had taken were healed. He still felt sore and
uncomfortable, and his back still felt raw, but there was no longer proof that he’d been raped.

“What will it take to leave the girls alone?” Harry asked, dreading the answer.

“You swear an Oath that you’ll let us keep doing this to you until we break you, and we’ll swear Oaths to leave them alone.”

“You’ll swear that you’ll not knowingly allow them or anyone they care for aside from me to come to harm, and I’ll swear to return and tell no one of our agreement.”

“How do I know you’ll swear to your side after I’ve sworn to mine?” Draco asked.

“I’m a fucking Gryffindor, Malfoy. We’re so stupid about Oaths it’s not funny. Besides, I Swear to make my Oath as I specified, if you, Crabbe and Goyle make yours first.”

“Sneaky, Potter, but it’s worth it. I Swear that I’ll not allow Parkinson, Bones, Lovegood, or Granger to come to harm, nor those that they care for, excluding Potter.” Crabbe and Goyle repeated the formula, and a flare of light filled the room for a moment.

“I Swear to tell no one of this agreement we have made.” Another flare. “At least now I know you can’t touch them,” he said.

“No, but I can still go after the Weaslette,” he smirked.

“Um, actually I think you’ll find that Luna still likes her and Ron. Hell, Hermione is hoping this whole thing can be worked out and that we’ll all be friends again someday. That’s two separate people who care for them.”

Malfoy looked angrily at Harry. “You’ll pay for that next time, Potter.”

“Of that I have no doubt, Malfoy. You’re petty that way.” He left the room and returned to the suite to find Hermione and Pansy nude in each others’ arms.

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“Of course, that was before Ginevra made her stupid comment in the Great Hall,” Harry said. “At the time the Oath was made, she had been given protection. I don’t think that Malfoy thought about testing it after Hermione told her off.”

“That boy is stupid, I can guarantee that,” Amelia Bones said. “The Oath he let you swear had so many holes in it that it’s not funny. You got a lot more than he did out of that.”

“I just want it all over, you know?” he said. “I used to love coming to this school, and now I just want to be finished here and out. I want to be shut of the Weasley family, except for the twins. I want to be shut of Gryffindor, and Slytherin, and Ravenclaw. They’ve even turned me off Quidditch, at least as a school activity. Might have been nice to see if I could do it as a professional thing, but I’m not out there to be seen by the ones who could make the offers, which is another thing that I can chalk up to Mister and Miss Weasley.

In an amazing display of timing, several Gryffindors came into the Hospital Wing with Ronald Weasley walking carefully amongst them. Wisps of smoke could be seen rising from behind him, and at least one other Gryffindor’s robes appeared to be the worse for wear, showing every sign of flame damage.

Harry was brilliant in managing to avoid any sort of facial expression as it became obvious what had happened. Exactly as he had planned, Ron had gorged on the Flatulence Fudge. Somehow it seemed that the label had been misplaced on that batch, and people though it was merely a box of fudge.

"Place is going to be a toxic wasteland for a while," he heard Dean murmur. "Everyone was eating that fudge." Ron inadvertently agreed with a loud eruption from his posterior, followed by pained whimpering.

"Got to admit that the distance he got with the flame was impressive, though," Seamus said in a strangled voice.

Dumbledore waved his wand, and the air cleared, followed by a barrier coming between the sections of the room. "When Miss Parkinson is free to be released, I believe that we should adjourn to my office and continue this conversation."

"As long as she promises to take it easy she is free to go," Madam Pomfrey said. "I have other patients to sort out." She turned around and headed toward Ron Weasley. "Now what childish prank has happened to cause this?" she asked.

Harry scooped Pansy into his arms as she stood. "Shall we head to your office, sir?" he asked. Both groups studiously ignored the other. It was rather obvious that the Gryffindors wanted to do something to Harry and company, but the presence of the adults prevented it.

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Amelia Bones looked at the spectacle before her eyes. It was radiating off this young man just how much he felt for the girl in his arms. As she watched his eyes slide across the other girls, she realised that it held true for the others as well. He was obviously deeply in love with all four young women. "Oh dear," she murmured to herself.

They walked to the Headmaster's office. She smiled to herself as she saw Miss Parkinson nestle into Mister Potter’s embrace and saw the smiles and looks of longing on the other girls’ faces. Susan met her eyes for a moment and shrugged as if to say, "What can I do? I love him." Amelia nodded her understanding.
Up in the Headmaster's office, they all sat in chairs that the Headmaster created, a love seat in Harry's case since he seemed to be showing no sign of releasing Pansy. "Our question now is to determine precisely this situation will be handled," the Headmaster said once everyone was settled.

"He leaves school. I can testify, Pansy can testify, the Pensieve memories should be considered valid. Now that he's broken his Oath, the signs of it should be obvious."

"I hate saying it, but we may have problems with that, legally speaking," Dumbledore responded.

"Find something that will stick, sir. If you don't, he'll be dead. I'll hunt the little ... He hurt Pansy, sir. What he did to her could have killed her, and Madam Pomfrey said that it was my getting her to the Hospital Wing that allowed her to be completely healed. He could have killed whomever he was raping with that little manoeuvre."

"Harry, it was necessary for -" Pansy began to say.

"No it was not!" he barked in response. "Losing any one of you girls just to get evidence against a Death Eater is not a fair trade and never will be! I will not accept any line of reasoning that says that it is!"

"You'd die for us though, Harry," Susan said. "You've said so. Why isn't it all right for us to be willing to do the same?"

"Because you ladies are worth dying for. I'm not."

Amelia heard six sharp intakes of breath, and realised that one of them was her own. "Mister Potter," she said, "Are you calling my niece stupid?"

He looked at her, horrified, thereby missing the twinkle that Dumbledore developed as he immediately realised where this conversation was going. "My God, no!" he answered, mortified. "She's smarter than I am!"

"She is willing to die for you. She obviously thinks you quite special. To tell her that you aren't worth dying for tells her that you think she has not the intelligence to make her own decision."

Harry was, simply put, gob smacked. He emulated a fish for a short while before he stood and walked over to Susan and knelt in front of her. "I'm sorry, Susan. I didn't realise what my actions were saying to you. I'll accept whatever punishment you desire."

Amelia schooled her face not to react as she saw the rather overt signs of sexual arousal in her niece. Susan bit her lower lip for a moment and then giggled. "Well, Harry, since you're down there ..." she said.

"If you want that, I will," he responded seriously.

"Ah well, there goes my hearing again," Dumbledore said quietly, with a hint of a smile on his face. He was uncharacteristically silent for this conversation, Amelia noted.

"Only when you actually want to do it because you desire me, Harry, not because you think you owe me. " She stood and pulled him to his feet and into a tight hug. "I know you, and I didn't think badly of you. I love you, Harry James Potter."

Amelia was stunned by the look of emotional pain that hit his face as she said that. "I wish that I could say the same," he replied, a suspicious wetness at the corners of his eyes.

"Harry," Amelia said, "I've been around the block, as the Muggles would say. You show every sign of being in real love, not the standard school-boy crush that so many mistake for love. I've been made aware of the living conditions in the suite you five share, and whether she intended to or not, Susan has made me aware of just how honourable you are. I am quite certain that she would, in fact, make love to you with witnesses such as myself around, if it meant that you would finally make love to her. I've watched your reactions, and while it is most obvious at the moment concerning your feelings for Miss Parkinson, you also make it obvious for those with eyes that can see it that you are deeply in love with each of these girls as well."

"But I feel it for all four, so it can't be love," he protested.

Amelia was completely stunned by that statement. "Who told you that?" she asked in shock.

"Not everything that the Dursleys taught me was wrong," he said defensively.

"If it dealt with an emotional subject, though, count on it," Hermione said. "Remember, one man and multiple women is not 'Normal', so your uncle would hate it. Even while fantasising about it all the time." She shuddered. "Bad mental image there. Bad image," she finished with a laugh, gently smacking the side of her head as if to dislodge something.

"You think that's bad," Harry responded, "I have the actual mental image of that man naked seared into my brain. His towel fell off while leaving the shower once. " He frowned. "Of course he blamed it on me, and I didn't eat for three days because of it." He shuddered. "Not that I could have eaten, after seeing that."
"You're trying to change the direction of the conversation," Amelia said. "I happen to know the law concerning multiple lovers. I know it because I needed the information myself. I have been with Dale and Emily for over thirty years now."

"It's why I didn't even blink at the possibility, Harry," Susan interjected. "You think of yourself as a pervert or worse for feeling what you do for us. That must mean that I'm a pervert as well, Harry, because I'd marry all four of you in a heartbeat. I'd be proud to call Hermione and Pansy my wives." She looked over at Luna, eyes shining, and took the blonde girl's hand. "Need I say how I feel for you, Luna?" She looked back to Harry. "Does it make me a pervert to want to have a huge bed the five of us can share?"

Harry started to open his mouth, and Hermione cut him off. "No double standards allowed, Harry. If we're not wrong for having fallen for each other, then you're not wrong for feeling the way you do about all of us."

He sat, confusion evident on his face. "I don't know what to think anymore."

"Well, what you should think about right now," Amelia said, "is the fact that all five of you are safe, Draco Malfoy is about to be carted off to a Ministry holding cell, and that you can hopefully get on with your lives. I have no problems with your living arrangements, although …" She paused before adding with a laugh, "I can't believe I'm saying this. I'd recommend you get everyone's hormones under control. Susan's going to explode with the way you keep teasing her."

Harry blinked. "Me teasing her? She's the one who's got a body that should be enshrined as living art!" He suddenly realised who he had said that to, and his face did something odd. He somehow managed to blush and go pale at the same time. "I'm sorry for -"

Susan shushed him before he could continue. "Thank you for the compliment, Harry. I told Aunt Amelia about the night I unsuccessfully tried to seduce you. I'd swear to that series of events under Veritaserum."

"I trust you, Susan." Amelia frowned. "Back to the question at hand. What do we have on hand that I can use to charge Draco Malfoy with?"

"Two direct witnesses of his assaults. As high as four if you can convince Crabbe and Goyle to testify against him," Harry said.

"This is Crabbe and Goyle," Pansy said. "It takes both of them to add up to half a brain."

Harry nodded with a smile. "We have my memories, which can be put into a Pensieve. I'm not sure writing it down would do anything for the case, though. The Pensieve would show everything that I was writing about. We may be able to get Malfoy to testify, but maybe not."

"He swore an Oath, did he not?" Amelia Bones asked. When Harry nodded, she smiled. "There is magical evidence as well. We can force him to testify."

Harry nodded. "Good. Maybe we can get some peace at the school once he's gone."

"No, we still have Gryffindors to deal with," Hermione grumbled.

Harry snorted. "Think Ron's learned his lesson yet about overindulging? We can deal with the Gryffies."

Susan nodded accord but then smiled mischievously at him. "Now what are you going to do about our problem, Harry?"

"And me," three other teenaged witches chorused.

Amelia Bones just laughed.
Like A Phoenix From The Ashes
Chapter 10

The next morning, the tables in the Great Hall were abuzz with the information that Draco Malfoy was in the Hospital Wing. Rumours flew as to what had put him there, especially since Crabbe and Goyle were also there, although they had never lost consciousness. Some said that Draco had brought it on himself, while some of the Gryffindors were saying that Harry had hunted him down and beaten him nearly to death. The Weasley contingent at the table was resolutely silent, since there was a well known hatred running from their family to the Malfoys and back, but to gloat over what had happened would mean that they would then be supporting Harry. This was right out, as far as they were concerned. There also appeared to be some quiet conversation among the upperclassmen.

At their usual table, six people sat, talking over the previous night's occurrences. "Wait," Neville said, "you simply grabbed Pansy and Apparated to the Hospital Wing? How did … after all, as I'm sure Hermione will point out -" She grinned and said, "According to Hogwarts, A History, you can't Apparate on Hogwarts grounds."

"Well, maybe Dobby appeared and carried us there without me knowing. Maybe Hogwarts herself loves me," Harry pondered facetiously. "No matter how I did it, I'm just glad I got her there in time." He shook his head. "What Draco did tore her apart inside, and if not for us getting there so fast, she might have had permanent damage. I'm just thankful that whatever got me to the Hospital Wing was there to do it."

Pansy thought for a moment. "I wish I knew why the little shit screamed when he started to violate me," Pansy said, brows knit in confusion. "It was nothing that I did to him."

"It could be the Oath that he swore," Hermione said. "The most likely outcome from breaking an Oath such as the one that he swore would be to visit pain on the one causing it."

Luna chimed in. "He'd better hope the Muggle magicians aren't right," she said in a sing-song voice.

"Explain, please," Harry said.

"They have a rule; a law, really. They call it the Three-fold Law. I think it goes something like, 'What you wish for me and mine, returns three times to thee and thine.' I'm not sure how they enforce it, though."

"I've heard of that," Hermione said. "I was studying various religious practices of the Muggles for an extra credit essay in Muggle Studies, and came across that Law. My studies seem to indicate that it's not a literal law, but a belief of a group that calls themselves Wiccans or Wiccans (either is correct, apparently). They believe that it's a spiritual or religious law on par with physical laws such as gravity or electromagnetic forces." She stopped and looked at the others, who were looking between Harry and her in amusement. "Sorry, I get pedantic at times, and …."

"You've got a dangerous weapon there, Hermione. I think he likes it when you get like that."

Harry blushed profusely and tried to hide the physical evidence that he rather liked it when she did 'get like that'.

It was fairly late in the month when Albus Dumbledore called the five of them to his office. "I have the unpleasant duty to inform you that willful ignorance and corruption still run rampant at the Ministry. It was decided that there was simply not enough evidence against Draco Malfoy to make a viable court case." He paused. "It is possible that some good may still come of it, however. Amelia Bones has decided that it is time to do a full audit of the Minister's finances, and she has convinced the management of Gringotts to help her."

"She was there to do it." Harry shook his head as if to clear the extraordinary thought. "However, this means that Draco will not pay criminally for his assaults on either of you."

Harry shook his head. "Makes sense, mind you. This is my last year, so it's back to being treated like shit by the wizarding world, pardon my language." He frowned as the others looked puzzled. "It's a pattern that got thrown off by Voldemort returning. First and third years I was lauded as wonderful and something worth protecting. Second year I was the Heir of Slytherin, and fourth I was that evil boy trying to take the glory from Cedric. With Moldy coming back, and me making the mistake of actually saying it, that carried the crap into the next year as well; I became an attention seeking idiot with mental problems. Until, of course, the Minister was forced to admit that Voldemort was back when he showed up at the frickin Ministry! Then I was lauded as the brave hero, silently accepting the slings and arrows of an unforgiving public while the Ministry did everything it could to prove me right. If you believe what the Ministry was feeding to the papers, anyway. So since the pattern was disrupted, this is my year for being the recipient of all the world's crap."

"I do have some small good news for you, Harry," Dumbledore said with a very small smile. "While we may not have been able to imprison him for his deeds, there are two things that you need to know. First off, because he broke his Oath, he apparently receives what he gives unto others. If he attacks them, he receives the curses and blows. If he does good unto them, he receives that in return. Being who he is, he has not made that connection, and it seems that those who discovered it forgot to tell him. The second thing you may be pleased to hear is that, while he will not face punishment in the criminal arena, he will in the academic. Amelia Bones and I talked to the Board of Governors for the school, and we have a nearly unanimous decision to expel him from Hogwarts, the only say vote coming from Lucius Malfoy, of course."

Harry brightened. "A small ray of sunshine in an otherwise dark and dingy school year." He paused. "Present company excluded, of course," he said with a slight blush. He received five smiles in return, not to mention the twinkle that accompanied the Headmaster's smile.

Professor Snape entered the office. "I am sorry to bother you, sir, but I just received word that Narcissa and Draco are walking up from Hogsmeade to retrieve his belongings. I thought you might wish to know."
"Thank you, Severus." Albus frowned slightly. "I can not stop you from doing so, but I would appreciate it if you would not find him and taunt his final exit of the school."

Harry nodded. "I have no problems with that. I would like to be there to watch him exit for the last time, but I promise not to start anything that would otherwise provoke him. Other than being alive, that is." His face formed a momentary grimace, something that looked like it was trying to be both a smile and a frown at the same time. "Ladies?" he asked as he turned to them.

They all nodded their agreement, and Pansy spoke up. "Not to change the subject, but ever since - well, the thing that caused today's jubilant occasion, you've not called us girls since then. Why is that?"

"You've proven that you are all ladies," Harry said simply, as if the very concept were obvious. "Calling you girls assumes that you show a level of immaturity that just isn't there, and therefore insults you. Also, I use it as a term of respect."

"Thank you," she replied, then kissed his cheek, making him blush yet again.

Albus stood. "I am loath to end this pleasant conversation, but I feel that I must be there for Mrs. Malfoy and her son to complain to for a bit. If you all will excuse me? You may stay if you wish." He stood and quickly exited the office.

Severus Snape turned as well, but Harry stopped him quickly. "Sir? I want to thank you again for your help this past month. I think that without you as a sounding board, the ladies here would have had a much rougher month."

The Potions teacher snorted. "You have managed this year to destroy a much-cherished notion, I'll have you know. I was quite secure in the knowledge that you were an overbearing, spoiled brat who needed his head deflated on a regular basis, exactly as your father was at this age." He smiled very slightly. "How dare you change my perceptions."

"I'm sorry, sir," Harry chuckled. "I'll change back to your old image of me immediately."

"Don't you dare!" Severus replied with something that sounded suspiciously like his own laugh. "Now, I must be there to protect the Headmaster from being sliced by Narcissa's sharp tongue." He also left.

Susan's eyes twinkled. "They'll be gone for a while. Should we leave, or should I live out my fantasy of making love on the Headmaster's desk?"

Harry's eyes closed as he tried to banish the image that came to mind at that question. He also knew that it was fairly obvious to them that he wasn't successful. "I think we'd best exit as well," he strangled out.

"That's cruel, Susan," Hermione said quietly at the bottom of the stairwell. Just entering the top, Harry still managed to hear the whispered conversation.

"I don't mean to be, Hermione," came the soft response. "I love him so much, and I admit that he makes me so horny it hurts sometimes. Should I cut back on the teasing?"

"I don't know. I can come up with logical reasons both ways."

Once he was at the bottom of the stairs, Harry pulled Susan into a hug. "Thank you, Susan. I don't mean to frustrate you so much. I'm so confused these days. At one point I felt for you four exactly as I felt for Ginny, but it's different now. I don't have a reference for it, so I can't describe it to you. But you all mean the world to me, and I don't want you hurt."

He took a deep breath. "Merlin knows that I'd like to be friends with benefits with all four of you." He chuckled. "I think I'm making that especially evident to you right now, Susan." He went serious again. "But I just ... I don't ... I don't want you thinking it means that I love you. I don't know anymore what I feel for you, and making love to any to you - well, it would be far too easy to convince ourselves that it's love, and you'd be hurt. I'll be damned if I'll let any of you get hurt if I can do something to prevent it. I know the rejection hurts, but it's got to be less painful than giving your heart completely to me."

He missed the look that passed amongst the women he shared his suite with.

They headed to the entrance hall to await Draco's final exit from the building. Harry specifically pulled Susan against him self to hug her, her back against his chest. "I rather like the teasing, Susan. If it makes you happy, then keep it up." He paused and chuckled. "I can guarantee that I will if you do."

"Harry!" she said, in delighted shock.

"I've told you before what you do to me, and I'm the only male in this school who's been lucky enough to see the best ass in the school unclothed. As long as you realise how I feel about you, tease me for as long as it makes you happy." He paused. "Besides, if I'm honest with myself, you doing that makes me start to believe that I just might be worth loving, even after this whole mess with the ferret."

She turned in his arms. "You are worth loving, Harry." She reached up and pulled his head down a little, and placed a gentle, passionate kiss on his lips before disengaging completely from him equally as gently.

There was a look of wonderment on his face as they broke, and it changed as he stood there. It almost seemed as if he were coming to an epiphany when they heard noise from further in the building, and turned to face Dumbledore, Snape, and the two Malfoys walking toward them.
"Well, if it isn't Potter and his whores," Draco said as they got close enough. "Here to gloat over my removal?"

"No," Harry said. "Just ensuring that your stench will never again corrode the stone of these hallways." Narcissa inhaled deeply in shock and anger, and opened her mouth as if to respond. "You're a Black by birth, cousin," he said before she could speak. "That gives you some leeway in my eyes, since the family did produce two decent people."

"Thank you," she said through gritted teeth and with a grudging nod.

"I thought you'd appreciate being known for being a sister to Andromeda and a cousin to Sirius," he said with a cheeky grin. "Until you declare yourself in opposition to Voldemort by divorcing Lucius and disavowing him, I'm afraid I have to consider you in the same boat as your other sister, the wanted fugitive." He could see Severus's look of rage, but he had also learned something of the man's body language. Severus Snape was fighting quite hard to avoid laughing uproariously.

"Insolent little half-blood," Narcissa snapped. "Someday you will come to appreciate your betters."

"Oh, I do," Harry said sincerely. "And I thank the gods every morning that these four were brought into my life." He gave the two closest to him, Pansy and Susan, one-armed hugs.

Draco was seething at this point and proceeded to prove his level of intelligence to everyone present. "You'll not get away with insulting my family, Potter! Everberro!" An ugly purple beam about six inches across belched from Draco's wand and sped toward Harry. Given the short distance between the two, there was no chance for anyone to do anything to stop the beam from hitting Harry. This led to them not being able to react with anything more than stupefied shock when it simply hit Harry and did nothing. However, at the moment that it struck Harry's chest, Draco exploded across the hallway, smashing into the stone hard enough to shake dust loose from the ceiling.

They stared for a few moments before Narcissa turned to tear into Harry. She stopped short at his own look of shock, and even horror, and was apparently surprised even further by his running to Draco and pulling his wand. He murmured something and ran his wand over Draco, then shouted, "St. Mungo's emergency ward, now!" at Dumbledore.

Without a second's hesitation, the headmaster pulled out a scrap of paper and tapped his wand to it, murmuring "Portus." He handed it to Narcissa and Severus and told them to place it on Draco and then activate it. Moments later, the three were gone.

He turned to Harry and said, "I may not have the right, Harry, but I am quite proud of you right now. You had a chance to legitimately let a long-standing foe die, and none would have thought worse of you. Rather, you have likely saved his life."

"How could I do otherwise, sir? If I let him die, you know that there would be stories about me killing him in the paper, and Fudge would be calling for my head. Probably have me in Azkaban with a snapped wand before you could finish pronouncing the 'S' in 'Stop!'"

"I wish that I could argue with you," came Dumbledore's sad reply, "but his history has shown otherwise."

As November slid into December, Harry was unfortunately proven right once more. Malfoy, now free of reprisals from Harry and friends, had apparently gotten to the Daily Prophet and put his own spin on the past few months. There were now nearly daily articles about Draco's recovery from the curse that Harry had apparently so viciously cast upon him, and how this was actually the result of a lover's spat gone terribly wrong. "The truth be damned," Harry had muttered at the time. "Whatever sells the most papers. God forbid they actually talk to me to find out my side."

Dumbledore had informed him that Pensieve memories would not be accepted if they attempted to fight it, because of the fact that Albus was a known supporter of Harry's and an extremely skilled Legilimens. This would make any Pensieve memories suspect. Severus didn't dare go public lest he be rather severely chastised by Voldemort. "Cornelius was rather pleased to be telling me this," Albus told Harry in one of his rare angry moods.

The school's reaction was exactly what he knew it would be. Even some of the Hufflepuff students began to question supporting him, which had Susan seething quietly. Some of the Ravenclaw students began a petition to request that the Board of Governors find some method of censuring Harry for the conduct being reported in the Prophet.

It reached the point that Dumbledore was forced to put up wards to prevent Howlers from making it onto school grounds, done so because of a particularly heart-rending piece of fiction created by Draco. Two hundred and forty-three Howlers were delivered the day the story printed, with nearly two hundred of them arriving at almost the same moment during breakfast. The resulting explosion of sound blew out the windows in the Great Hall.

Unfortunately, the explosion of noise caused by meddlesome people who trusted only what they read in the paper gave just enough ammunition to those in the school trying to hurt him. He was informed two weeks and three days before the winter break began that he was being suspended from school for the two weeks prior to the break, and the two weeks after, since he had obviously become a severe danger to other students.

"The Board feels that my absence during this time may permit tempers to cool and is sorry that they felt the necessity to do this," he growled to the Headmaster as the five of them sat in Dumbledore's office. Harry looked up. "So, I'll head to Grimmauld Place tonight, after classes are finished."

Luna looked thoughtful for a moment. "I had always wondered what happened when someone spoke of a thing protected by Fidelius," she finally said. "It's either that, or you have begun to speak Gibberish like a native."
The two men sat and talked for a while about anything and everything with Remus getting a promise extracted (quite easily, if truth be told) to take Hermione, and you're planning on marrying her too."

"Finally admitted it to yourself," said Remus, pulling Harry into a hug. "I'm glad to hear it. We've all been wondering when it would finally strike you with the four of them. I think I was doing, I'm in love. I'm in love!"

"No, not yet. Actually, I didn't really think about it until you actually asked it, and suddenly realised that I actually do want to spend the rest of my life with Voldemort, and now you're talking about what you plan to do afterwards."

"I have four women who have given me a reason to live, Remus."

"Okay, sir, but they have the court of public opinion behind them and will probably use that to bludgeon you with." He stood. "Well, time to go pack, I think."

Back in his quarters, he began to load everything he owned into his trunk's multiple compartments. "Harry?" Pansy asked. "Why are you taking everything?"

"Because I fully expect that the six weeks I will be gone from this school will conveniently end up with my utter removal from the school - for the safety of others, of course. I'd prefer not to be in a situation where I must place myself at the mercy of the other students, since they have none. If I'm wrong about my expulsion, then I will come back without a problem. If I'm right, I've saved myself a trip." His packing finished, save for the books he still needed, he turned to face four very unhappy women. "Aw crap. What did I do wrong this time?"

"Thinking it through so logically," Hermione answered. "You're entirely right about your logical progression. Draco will surely work to get you expelled and then himself reinstated."

"I'm out of here the day that happens," Susan replied. "I don't care if I miss my N.E.W.T.s. I will not stay in this school if that monster is given free reign, which is what the Governors will be doing if they return him to this school. I follow Harry."

Pansy snarked. "That's a lesson that my fellow Slytherins would do well to learn - 'Just and loyal does not mean pushover.'" Susan smiled brightly at her.

Harry did not sit quietly at Number 12 Grimmauld Place. He threw himself into studying, stopping only when Dobby and Winky came to him and reminded him to eat. He wanted the holidays free of school worries, as far as homework was concerned, so he was trying to get that homework completed, up to and including the two weeks he'd miss after the break was over.

Remus was a regular visitor to the house, and Harry told him of his plans in regards to the second Fidelius Charm that they planned to cast. "Good thinking. What I'm really wondering is how you're handling this situation, though."

"How do you think? The wizarding world has caused me to invent a new word - sheeple. They follow blindly, like sheep, after all. They forget what happened just a month ago. I mean, seriously Remus. How can they go after Draco like a shark goes after blood, and then turn around and trust the word of the same person that they were savaging just days before? They were cheering the expulsion of Malfoy from Hogwarts!" He sighed and ran a hand through his hair in frustration. "I tell you this, Remus: when this is all done, and Voldemort lies dead at my feet, I'm leaving before they can decide to throw me in Azkaban for his murder. I understand that the Americans have a decent wizarding population."

"You'll likely run into the same attitude," Remus replied. "The 'Sheeple Effect', I guess you could call it, is a worldwide phenomenon and not limited to wizards and witches." He smiled suddenly. "I'm glad to hear one thing, though. You spent last year unsure if you were going to survive the fight with Voldemort, and now you're talking about what you plan to do afterwards."

"I have four women who have given me a reason to live, Remus."

"So when's the wedding?" came Remus's laughing response to that. He stopped suddenly when he saw that Harry was blushing. "You didn't!"

"No, not yet. Actually, I didn't really think about it until you actually asked it, and suddenly realised that I actually do want to spend the rest of my life with Pansy Parkinson, I'd have been looking for signs of the Imperius. Now I know her myself and can't think of a better choice." He grinned. "Except Hermione, and you're planning on marrying her too."

The two men sat and talked for a while about anything and everything with Remus getting a promise extracted (quite easily, if truth be told) to take
Harry was shopping for rings. He wanted an engagement ring for each of them.

It was the last day of the first term, and Harry was waiting anxiously for them to get out of school and get to Grimmauld Place. He’d killed some time with his regular rape counseling session, but even the therapist had noticed his inability to concentrate. “Sorry,” Harry had said, “but … damn. I’m planning on asking them to marry me, and I’m nervous. I love them, and thanks to all the sessions with you, Severus Snape, and the ladies, I’m really starting to believe that it’s not my fault. That even the rapes I ‘agreed’ to were forced because it was the only way I knew to keep them safe.” The Healer had smiled and wished him luck.

He’d paced nervously, and even Dobby and Winky had not complained about his cleaning the house alongside them, after Harry explained simply that he was nervous. "Dobby understands nervousness, Master Harry." He looked conspiratorially at Harry. "Dobby gets quite nervous around Winky these days, and for the same reason Master Harry is nervous, Dobby thinks."

"Well, if you do feel that way about her, then congratulations!" Harry replied with a smile. "Tell her soon, Dobby. It'll ease both your minds." The cleaning continued, and four bedrooms were set aside nearest the master suite, although Harry confided that two of them probably would not be used. Both elves' eyes sparkled with mirth at the implication.

It was approaching the evening when Dobby walked into the room, carrying a newspaper and scowling. "Owls thinking above their stations. Hedwig is not so rude," he muttered.

"What do you have there, Dobby?"

"Nasty owl delivered this newspaper. Dobby found a note with it as well." He handed the paper and the note to Harry.

The note simply read, "I thought you should see this," in a hand that Harry didn't recognize. He opened the newspaper to see a headline that horrified him.

Students killed in freak accident at Hogwarts.

by Dilwyn Barton

Hogwarts was stunned today when a freak accident took the lives of four students. At publication time the particulars of the incident were unknown, but this reporter has at least learned the identities of those students who lost their lives. The four students in question were Muggleborn Hermione Granger; Pansy Parkinson, the daughter of Alonzo and Aldonza Parkinson; Luna Lovegood, daughter of fellow publisher Lawrence Lovegood; and Susan Bones, niece of the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement Amelia Bones. Our hearts and our prayers go out to those families affected at this normally most joyous time of year.

Further information will be brought to you as it is learned.
Like A Phoenix From The Ashes
Chapter 11

There was an Order meeting scheduled for the very night that the school term ended, so members began to show up and filter toward their usual meeting place in the kitchen. He greeted them calmly, and most of them didn't think twice about his solemn demeanour.

Remus finally appeared, and he came running to Harry. "Harry, something happened at the school! I -"

"I know about it. It made the paper, and someone sent me an advance copy, probably to hurt me." He motioned to the table in the sitting room, where the paper sat in plain view. The hollow, dead feeling in his chest didn't permit Harry to express any emotions at all even if his body was still functioning.

"I'm surprised that you didn't come rushing to the school," Remus said, visibly surprised at Harry's calm acceptance of the situation.

"What good would it have done? The deed was done, and my being there would have not only put me in the way, but likely have led to an increase of my suspension time from school. Besides, by the time I'd learned of it, said deed was hours old."

"True," Remus replied. "Still, it was surprising. And I apologise for not thinking of you sooner. There was just so much chaos at the time that -"

"Don't worry about it, Remus. What's done is done, and we go from there. Now, as we've been talking, the others are all gathering in the kitchen, including the group of traitors that I wish weren't." He saw Albus Dumbledore appear in the foyer. "And the leader is here, so it would probably be a good idea to get this meeting started, since there are things to do. Like getting these damned Weasleys out of my house." He looked to the Headmaster. "I already know about what happened at Hogwarts, sir. Let's just get things started."

Albus frowned for a moment, but noted that Molly was staring disapprovingly toward them. "Indeed, Harry. The sooner we begin, the sooner we may finish." They trio headed into the kitchen to begin the meeting.

They entered the room to find the entire Weasley family there, even Ginny, whom Molly had insisted be granted membership during the month of August at a meeting that Harry and Hermione had been unable to attend. Moody, Dung, Hestia Jones, Tonks, Remus, Shacklebolt and Snape were there.

The meeting rapidly finished with old business and began to change into a discussion of current Death Eater tactics and how to respond to them. Harry's frown grew more and more noticeable, until Ron barked out, "What's your problem, Potter? You think you know better than they do how to deal with things?"

Harry stood. "Since there are so many Weasleys here, I'll actually refer to you by your first name, Ronald. How about you open your mouth when you have something worthwhile to add to the conversation? As for your question, I'm hearing things that I don't like."

"So am I, but then you stop talking and everything returns to normal."

Harry frowned, ignoring Ron. "We're acting in a reactive mode, a defensive mode, people. What we need ... the Muggles have a phrase: 'The best defense is a strong offense.' Well, it's about time we start offending." Remus snickered at the play on words, and Harry nodded at him in appreciation.

"And how do you propose to do that?" Ginny mocked. "I suppose you have some idea of where they're going to attack next?"

"Not right now I don't. But that's what we need to do. We're fighting a war, damn it, and all we've done is react. People know about the damned Prophecy, and everyone is subconsciously acting like they're waiting for the stars to be right for the last battle. We're in a war, and in a war, you do things like what was done today at Hogwarts, to those four. We need to bring the battle to them. We need to set up something that Tom just can't let pass. We need something that he just can't do without, that he won't trust to anyone else to bring to him, to get his ass dealt with. To deal with his Death Eaters, we need something big at the same time. He'll send some to deal with one thing, and be at the other."

He turned to the group. "Another thing to get through our heads is that we are doing shit damage to them if we continue to merely stun them and incapacitate them. We. Are. At. War. People die. Patton, the American general during their war that happened while the wizards were fighting Grindelwald, said something like, 'The point is not for you to die for your country, but to make the other poor bastard die for his.' We need to start shooting to kill. Blasting and Bludgeoning Curses to the head and vitals. Slicing Curses to the neck. I think the minute we start showing a desire to inflict equal to worse damage to them, they'll start thinking twice about their choices." He paused. "Right now, with our actions, they feel like they're winning. I want to make them feel like they're winning Pyrrhic victories."

"What are you talking about?" Ron asked. "You're planning on burning them? You're a sick bastard, all right."

"So brilliantly wrong. I'm surprised you knew how to spell it. It's a Muggle reference, so I doubt you'd even have paid attention once you'd learned that. Pyrrhus fought the Romans and won but with heavy losses. He was reported to have said, 'Another such victory and we are undone.' It means that we try to hurt them badly. If they come in with sixty, I want them to leave with less than half of their number still alive. They made their decision, let them pay for it. Might make a few more of them make Severus's decision." He turned to the Potions professor and nodded. "He did it because it was the right thing, but if we can make them leave because they want to live, that's okay too."

"Why so harsh, Harry?" Albus Dumbledore asked with worry. "That can be a worrisome road to begin."

Still in the same calm, inflectionless voice he'd been using all along, Harry answered, "I'm not going Dark, sir. I loathe the idea. But tell me why
“What about that ring?” Ginny asked. “The one Hermione wears, the one that the box said was for Pansy? Explain that!” She had started calmly, her condolences. The kiss was on the forehead, and the hug was one of comfort.

“Quite refreshing, too,” Albus acknowledged with a small smile. “And I see your point, Harry. I do not like it, but you are correct. We are not killing from enjoyment but rather from duty.” He sighed. “I have been a warrior for life for so long that I forgot that sometimes death is necessary to preserve other lives.”

“I can’t believe this, Albus!” Molly said. “He stands here and advocates openly murdering people, and you agree with him?”

“Not off the top of my head. I know how to get Tom to the last battle. That part’s easy.”

“Bint,” Harry murmured as if to himself but pitching it for the table to hear. “This idea is so simple that even you can grasp it, Ron. We make Tom aware that I want to meet with him. I take an Oath to bring no wand with me. I load the area beforehand with no end of Muggle devices and such, and when Tom arrives, blow his ass to Kingdom Come. They’ll be picking up pieces of him for months.”

“Why, Harry?” Remus asked in a puzzled tone.

“Thank you,” he said quietly. “Now, does anyone have anything germane to the conversation?”

“Deafness Charm on himself.” Harry said with a shrug. “It’s really rather simple, when you think about it. He needs to go away, permanently. He has sixty years of magical experience on his side. I don’t.

“Besides, you’ve all forgotten something. This is a war. I’m a soldier in it. I’m expendable. It’s the people around me, those whom I love, you people, that I worry about. Me? I die, it’s no big thing. I can be replaced. You can’t.” He paused. “Besides, it’s time I was reunited with those who love me. I’m tired. I hurt, and I just want it over. I’m sorry, but there’s just … there’s just nothing here for me anymore. I just want to be reunited with my family.” He walked to the door, mildly surprised that no one tried to stop him.

The room was stunned by Harry’s admission, but was stunned even further when Bill turned to Charlie and snarled, “Are you proud of yourself? I know I’m not.”

“What are you talking about?” Molly asked, confusion written deeply on her face.

“Everything that has happened to him this school year - everything bad, can be traced back to us.”

“What are you saying, Charlie?” Arthur asked, his face going white as suspicions began to play through his mind.

“Charlie opened his mouth and then closed it again. He repeated this a few times before Bill said, “Coward. We told you the truth on August twelfth, but in such a way that it was a lie. Yes, Harry was seen hugging and kissing Pansy Parkinson. Her grandfather had just died, and he was giving her condolences. The kiss was on the forehead, and the hug was one of comfort.”

“What about that ring?” Ginny asked. “The one Hermione wears, the one that the box said was for Pansy? Explain that!” She had started calmly,
them anyway, but this is it. To hell with them afterward. Let them make up stories I care for, and they’re the ones that I want to He took a deep breath. “Y’know, Remus, if I manage to survive this battle with Tom, I’m leaving. There’s a handful of people here that I like and that would just prove to them that I was the next Dark Lord.”

“They did, unfortunately. I assume that you read about it in the Daily Prophet?”

“Malfoy or napalm?” Remus asked with a smile, trying to improve the mood. “How do you think I feel after a day like today, Remus? I feel like shit, to be dead honest with you. I just want it over, but it won’t be until I’ve had a stack of white paper with printing on it.”

“Doesn’t sound good, no matter what.”

Harry paused. “Do you know what you get if you mix petrol and petrolatum?” he asked, going off on a tangent.

“Homemade napalm. Sticks to you like Crabbe and Goyle to Malfoy. Flammable, too.”

“Regular human forgery is a like casting a Luminos spell for me. I can do it without thought.” He hung his head. “He told us after he woke up in the hospital that he’d bought that for you as a promise ring.”

Ginny turned white, followed by her eyes rolling up in her head. She slid bonelessly from the chair to the floor in a dead faint.

Fred and George turned to their eldest brothers. “So you admit that you decided that you had the right to screw up Harry’s life, right?” George demanded. “You decided that because you saw him in bed with our sister, that you had the right to destroy him? Not to mention what it’s done to Ginny?”

Fred turned to the remaining Weasleys, ignoring Bill and Charlie as if they didn’t exist. “You make us sick. We knew Harry better than you did. How could you even have thought that he’d do something like that, Ron? You roomed with him for six years! You even supported him dating Ginny! And then these two Death Eater wannabes come up with their story, and you believed them?”

“Damn!” Fred continued. “You people might as well have that tattoo on your arms! You know that he’s supposed to fight Voldemort! You know the Prophecy! So you took away the one thing that meant anything to him? Just how stupid are you?”

Albus broke in before the twins could build a proper head of steam. “And now the young man feels that he has nothing left to live for.” With more derision than anyone had ever heard in the man’s voice, he finished, “Might I offer my congratulations?”

“How do … how do we apologise?” Molly asked in a voice quieter than anyone could ever remember coming out of her.

Remus snorted. “Your real question is, ‘How do we get him to forgive us?’ The answer? You don’t. You can’t earn forgiveness - it has to be given freely, and Harry is not likely to give it, especially with how he’s feeling right now. In fact, I think I’m going to leave you alone with the rest of the Order while I go find Harry and talk to him. He needs his real friends now.” Remus stood and exited in a fluid motion.

Dung Fletcher stood. “I’m leavin’. Nothing more’s goin’ to be ‘appenin’ here tonight, and I need to be aroun’ people whose motives I know and understan’.” He hiccuped, stood and left as well.

“Let me offer my congratulations as well,” Moody growled. “When Dung gives up on ya, you’ve really sunk deep.”

“I can easily say that the meeting is finished,” Dumbledore said. “If you could please see yourselves to the door, I’m sure you would like to begin some much needed, though belated, soul searching.” The remaining Order members quietly but pointedly led the Weasleys (save the twins) to the exit point and saw them off.

Remus found Harry in the library looking through some of the books he had borrowed from the local Muggle public library, as well as a neatly stacked sheaf of white paper with printing on it. “Harry? How are you?”

“How do you think I feel after a day like today, Remus? I feel like shit, to be dead honest with you. I just want it over, but it won’t be until I’ve had a chance to kill our Dark Lord of the month. Because Bill and Charlie decided to show that the Weasley name means nothing, my final year at Hogwarts has just been shy of my worst one yet. That reminds me - I came to a decision today, and I need to catch the Headmaster before he leaves.”

“What did you decide?” Remus asked, having heard about Harry giving up the Head Boy badge.

“I need to prepare. I’m not returning to school, except when the N.E.W.T.s happen. No sense in more shit like today happening around the school. I refuse to be the catalyst. Instead, I’ll study here and prepare for my last meeting with Tom.”

Harry paused. “Do you know what you get if you mix petrol and petrolatum?” he asked, going off on a tangent.

“Doesn’t sound good, no matter what.”

“Homemade napalm. Sticks to you like Crabbe and Goyle to Malfoy. Flammable, too.”

“Malfy or napalm?” Remus asked with a smile, trying to improve the mood.

“I was talking about napalm, but I’m willing to find out as far as Malfoy is concerned,” Harry said seriously. “After all, it’s his lies in the paper that led to my suspension.” He paused. “You know, if I was going to survive past Voldemort, I’d probably use that short period before the wizarding world found another reason to hate me to utterly destroy the Board of Governors. I heard that they censured Amelia for speaking on my behalf.”

“They did, unfortunately. I assume that you read about it in the Daily Prophet?”

“Yup. I’m thinking about living long enough to get a proper revenge. Destroy the Board of Governors and turn Hogwarts back into a real school, rather than one where the Headmaster has to look over his shoulder to see what the Ministry is going to try to do to him this year.” He snorted. “No, that would just prove to them that I was the next Dark Lord.”

He took a deep breath. “Y’know, Remus, if I manage to survive this battle with Tom, I’m leaving. There’s a handful of people here that I like and care for, and they’re the ones that I want to defeat Voldemort for. The rest of the wizarding world? They … they aren’t worth saving, Remus. I’ll save them anyway, but this is it. To hell with them afterward. Let them make up stories about me. Let women say they had my love child - the goblins will,
Students injured in accident at Hogwarts

by Dilwyn Barton

Hogwarts was stunned today when an accident injured four students. At publication time the full particulars of the incident were unknown, but this reporter has learned both the identities of those students who were hurt and the fact that it may not have been an accident. The four students in question were Muggleborn Hermione Granger; Pansy Parkinson, the daughter of Alonzo and Aldonza Parkinson; Luna Lovegood, daughter of fellow publisher Lawrence Lovegood; and Susan Bones, niece of the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement Amelia Bones.

Immediate evidence seems to point toward a vendetta aimed at harming The Boy Who Lived, who this reporter feels was unfairly removed from the hallowed halls of what once was a valuable source of knowledge. The four injured are known to be close associates of his, and if rumours are to be believed, perhaps more than merely friends. This reporter, for one, hopes that at least those rumours are true.

Further information will be brought to you as it is learned.

"Is ... is this the real article, sir?" Harry asked, feeling literally weak in the knees.

"There was a very subtle Illusion Charm placed on the newspaper, to make the article that you read seem to be the true one. Also, layered beneath the illusion, but quite strong in its own way, is a charm to make anyone reading the illusory article trust what they are reading, especially since their resistance will be lessened due to the at least momentary shock. Those who know the illusion, but quite strong in its own way, is a charm to make anyone reading the illusory article trust what they are reading, especially since their resistance will be lessened due to the at least momentary shock. Those who know the information to be false can break the power of the charm." He turned to Remus. "Do you believe the author of that note to be whom I suspect?"

"If your suspect is Narcissa Malfoy, then yes. And she'd have no problem getting her hands on an advance copy, what with owning significant resistance will be lessened due to the at least momentary shock. Those who know the illusion, but quite strong in its own way, is a charm to make anyone reading the illusory article trust what they are reading, especially since their resistance will be lessened due to the at least momentary shock. Those who know the information to be false can break the power of the charm." He turned to Remus. "Do you believe the author of that note to be whom I suspect?"

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"Hopefully that involves enjoying us four?" she asked raggedly.

"And my life, and I mean that in a very good way. The twins literally bit the insides of their mouths to keep silent.

"… it's called being horny," Tonks quipped.

"I'm alive, that's all that matters, Harry." He inhaled the scent of her hair deeply before finally releasing her from the hug, but then immediately took hold of one of her hands. As she reacted with pleased startlement, Harry said, "I'm surprising both of you with this, but I'm not waiting any longer. Madam Bones, if your niece will have me, I intend to marry her and the other three ladies that make my life worth living. If she says yes, I would ask your blessing on the union." Before Amelia could respond, he turned back to Susan and dropped to one knee. "I haven't the ring yet - Remus and I were going to get them..."

"Indeed we are," Albus said as he entered the room with both Susan and Amelia behind him.

The world went away for Harry as he choked out a sob. All he could see at the moment was Susan and the fact that, while bruised, she was most definitely alive and standing before him. He swept forward and pulled her into a hug. "Oh my God, Susan!" he whispered, trying hard not to cry. "You have no idea how good it is to see you alive right now."

"I'm alive, that's all that matters, Harry," she said.

He suddenly found himself flat on the floor, an armful of squirming young lady hugging him fiercely. "Yes, Harry! Yes, yes, YES!" she squealed, kissing him strongly as she finished her acceptance. He managed to keep enough sense of place to not let his hands roam where he wanted to, although it was a near thing - this was the best kiss she'd ever given him. And that was saying something.

As she rolled off him, he stood quickly and offered his hands to her to help her to her feet. Amelia looked sternly at him for a moment before breaking into a smile and pulling him into a hug. "Welcome to the family, Harry," she said simply.

"Thank you, Aunt Amelia," he said in a slightly cheeky tone. The response surprised him, though. Her eyes grew wide and suspiciously bright, and her face took on the look that said that she was holding back happy tears.

"Just don't make me a great-aunt too soon, all right?" she asked with a smile.

"It'd be nine months at a minimum, Auntie," Susan told her around a blush. "At least now maybe I can get him to do more than just frustrate me." She looked wickedly at Harry, who just laughed.

Amelia altered the direction of the conversation. "As for the other matter, most people aren't aware that their wand leaves a faint residue of its own unique aura when a spell is cast through it. Albus is good enough to not leave one behind, but he knows (for good reason) how to avoid leaving one. We'll get this one and get Narcissa in the process, I'll bet."

"Excellent," Harry said. "Fudge not knowing it means that Lucius probably doesn't know it, which in turn means that his family likely wouldn't know it."

"Let me contact their families and let you know. Give me just a few moments, if you would."
He nibbled her earlobe in response. "What do you think?"

"I think Aunt Amelia should leave right now, because I want to start something with you …"

"I still need to see the other three, Susan. Now that I know you're okay, except for a few bruises (which I promise to kiss better later), I need to see the others and make sure they're okay."

"I understand," she said with a smile. "I'll hold you to that promise to kiss all my bruises, however."

"Wasn't one of them on your bum?" Amelia asked with a sly grin. She could help but laugh when Harry's face lit up. It was obviously over the top, but it was also obvious that he was looking forward to it.

Albus chuckled as well. "I believe that it is time to drop by each of the other ladies' abodes and settle your mind."

The first stop was in Ottery St. Catchpole, where Luna was more than slightly surprised to be pulled into a fierce hug by Harry. "I'll explain when you come for Christmas, but you have no idea how glad I am to see you in good shape."

"Oh yes," Harry said. "She is a beautiful woman, and she's also physically quite attractive." He bit his lip. "Sir? I have a question for you. At what age do you think that a young woman, such as Luna for example, should become engaged to a man who adores her deeply and has recently discovered that he thinks his life would not be worth living if she weren't in it?" He smiled at the gasp from Luna, but never took his eyes from her father.

Lawrence smiled widely. "A woman such as Luna? Hmm, I'd say that it depends on the young man asking for her hand. Someone like Ronald Weasley? I'd recommend she wait until she's roughly one hundred and fifty or so. Neville Longbottom? He strikes me as someone whom I'd recommend she wait until she was at least eighteen. If it were you? I could likely have the paperwork and the minister ready by tomorrow morning."

"She's priceless, sir," he replied, turning to look into her eyes as he said it. "I could empty my vaults to pay the dowry for her, and I still wouldn't have begun to touch what she's worth. There isn't enough money for that." He dropped to his knee. "Will you have me, my lady? Will you consent to stand by my side with the others and be my bride?"

She flowed into his arms and kissed him sweetly. "I look forward to the wedding night, myself," she whispered and pressed against him as she felt his reaction.

"Me too," he replied. "And I want to practice for it at some point, as well," he whispered back. He chuckled to himself as he felt her knees wobble slightly.

"Really?" she asked, her eyes wider than normal and her voice full of hope.

"If I weren't standing right in front of your father, I'd complete that kiss from a couple months ago. I rather like the area where my hands came to rest."

"You're my fiancé, Harry. You're allowed to fondle me, father in the room or not." To prove her point, she carefully reached back and moved his hands to her shapely derriere.

"Gods, you have a great ass," he whispered so quietly that only she could hear it.

"Susan's is better," she replied conversationally. He blushed and finally released her.

They appeared in Godric's Hollow next, and Harry knocked on the door to the home he hoped someday to live in with four wives. Aldonza Parkinson opened it and smiled. "Honey, the landlord is here," she called back into the house, the humour evident in her voice. She also stepped back from the door, toward the wall.

This proved to be prescient as a black-haired blur exploded down the hall and attempted to tackle him with a hug. "Harry, are you all right?"

"You wouldn't be here if you weren't worried about me," she said smugly. "Besides, you haven't let go of me. You're still hugging me tightly."

"I needed to verify that you were still alive. I was sent a charmed advance copy of the Daily Prophet that announced that you four were dead, killed in the incident. I needed to see with my own eyes that the four women who are my life are alive."

She started at that and then closed her eyes tightly in pain for a moment. "Please don't say things like that, Harry. My heart takes them the wrong way."
No it doesn't," he said simply. Her eyes went wide. "I'm here for another reason as well. I need to tell you that you were wrong, and I need to ask your parents a question." He finally released her from the hug and faced them, standing very formally - almost at military attention.

"Mr. and Mrs. Parkinson. I apologise for my appearance as I ask so important a question, but I need to ask it. I am requesting the hand of your daughter Pansy in marriage. You need to be aware that I will be marrying at least two other women, but I am deeply and irrevocably in love with your daughter as well. The article that made me believe that she was dead made me realise that I truly did not wish to live if she and the others were not around." He heard her gasp in horror.

Aldonza looked at her husband and then to him. "Harry, we are Aldonza and Alonzo. There is no need to be so formal with your future in-laws."

"That's if she says yes," Harry said. He turned to Pansy and suddenly found himself in the same position as when Susan had accepted.

It was several minutes before she released his lips from her own. When she did, he whispered softly yet rather huskily in her ear, "Thank you for stopping then - if you'd kissed me like that any longer, we'd have been practising for the wedding night in front of them."

"I can tell," she murmured. "Shall I stay here until you're able to stand without embarrassment?"

"If you stay there, I won't be able to," he laughed. She climbed off him, and he stood beside her, adjusting his clothing somewhat.

"So, Pansy, what's your answer?" he asked her cheekily.

The last stop that night was in Maidstone. They appeared quietly and walked the short distance to the home of Keith and Dorothy Granger.

"They're going to hate me," Harry said. "I've been brilliantly lucky with other parents and guardians tonight. It all has to come apart here. I'm sure of it."

"They may well surprise you, Harry," Albus replied. He knocked on the door, which was opened by a tall man who seemed to be losing a fight with his hairline.

"Professor Dumbledore! What brings you here?" he said, ushering the two inside.

"Harry!" Hermione said, walking quickly toward him with a slight limp. "What's wrong?"

He pulled her into a hug, and finally everything caught up with him. He began to shudder and shake in her grasp, and a sob tore out of him. "I thought I'd lost you!" he was finally able to gasp out. "All of you!"

"I'm here, Harry, and I'm fine. They didn't get us. I'm here," she crooned, rocking back and forth as she held him. "I love you, Harry, and I'm here for you, no matter what." She pulled his head to her breast and rocked back and forth as the stress of the past few hours finally caught up with him.

A few minutes later, he finally started to climb out of his stress-induced shock to find himself in a bit of a quandary. He rather liked where his face was at the moment, but she was overdressed.

He reluctantly disengaged from her embrace, but not before gently kissing her. He turned to face her parents and found himself curious just how two people with straight hair, one person black haired and the other almost platinum blonde, managed to produce a girl with bushy brown hair.

"We're pleased to finally meet you, Harry," Keith said. "So when are you planning on proposing to our daughter? I need some warning so I can prepare my script for threatening you."

"Excuse me?" Harry asked.

"Dad thinks he has a sense of humour," Hermione said with some asperity. He noticed that she was blushing, however.

"Keith is joking, Harry. We trust our daughter's judgement, and we're actually looking forward to increasing the size of our family."

"Mother!" Hermione growled through her teeth, embarrassment being the most obvious emotion.

Harry smiled, wondering what her response would be to his next comment. "So if I were to ask your blessing to marry this beautiful woman, you'd say yes?"

"You'll have to ask, won't you?" Keith asked with an impish grin.

"Very well," was the reply. He turned to Hermione and dropped to one knee again. "Hmm, getting repetitive here," he murmured to himself with a smile. Looking up into her eyes, which had gone wide, he said, "I've done three other proposals today, Hermione. I don't know how to go about telling you what you mean to me. When I thought you had been killed at the school, I lost all reason to live. Finding out you were alive . . . Hermione, I don't know how much time I have left in this world, none of us do, but I do know that you're one of the ones I want to spend my remaining time with." He paused. "And I intend it to be many, many years. Will you agree to marry me and make my happiness complete?"

She pulled him to his feet, and then pulled off the ring she wore on her right hand; the one he had meant to give to Ginny in August. "When you give me an engagement ring, I'll say yes. This one should work quite well, in fact." She held out her left hand, and he slid the ring onto her ring finger, where it resized itself for a perfect fit. "Now, my answer is yes." They kissed again, to seal the bargain.

When they broke, Keith said, "Can we skip the standard threats I'm supposed to make and just jump to the partying? But if anyone asks, I was the
unreasonable father, okay?” He was answered with laughter.
Harry finally returned to Number 12 Grimmauld Place a very happy man. "Remus my good man," he said with a wide grin, "we have three - count 'em, three - rings to buy tomorrow. Hermione decided to use the one that the Scum Brothers convinced Ginny was for Pansy." He paused. "Did that make sense at all? Never mind. She accepted the white gold and ruby ring as her engagement ring, so I just need to pick rings for the other three ladies. Then we need to figure out when the wedding will take place. I think that will have to be a group decision. Is it before or after I defeat Voldemort and all his lackeys?"

He bounced over to Tonks and hugged her. "Have I told you recently that you are a beautiful woman and that Remus is a very lucky man to be in love with you?" He kissed her cheek and sped away, leaving behind a rather bemused Auror with her hand on the cheek he'd just kissed.

As he approached Amelia, she said with a large smile, "No, Mr. Potter, tell us how you really feel," which made him laugh.

"Do you have a few weeks?" he asked in reply. "Seriously, though, knowing that they are all alive and in fairly good shape," he stopped to wiggle his eyebrows suggestively, "well, that puts me in a good mood, to be honest." He looked around. "Where's Susan?"

"Your fiancée went up to the master suite," was Amelia's response.

He stopped his bouncing and looked at her squarely, his demeanour suddenly very serious. "Madam Bones, would you prefer that I find a different room tonight, since she is currently in what is usually my bedroom? Just say the word, and I will have Dobby and Winky set me up with any other room in this household."

The head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement put her hands on his shoulders and said, "It's Amelia. Were it any other young man, I'd have – well, no actually, if you were any other young man, we wouldn't be here having this conversation, because Susan wouldn't have given her heart to anyone else." She let go of his shoulders but stayed close to him. "Susan and I have an honest relationship, Harry. I'm as much her mother as I am her aunt, and we talk about all the things her mother should be here to talk to her about. She told me about that day in the middle of September; how a young man who was rather obvious in his interest in her carefully pushed her from the room rather than take what was offered." She smiled. "You sealed your fate that day with those ladies, you know. To answer your question - I cast the Contraceptive Charm on her myself. We have always been open with each other about affairs of the heart, and she convinced me that you

Harry pulled her into a tight hug. "Thank you, Aunt Amelia," he said softly.

"I know, but I - well, family is very important, and I wouldn't want to be the reason for you losing any respect for your niece." He shrugged somewhat shyly.

"And that attitude is exactly why I gained respect for her. She has magnificent taste in men. You are the only man I would ever do this for. Go. You both need this. You embraced Death earlier today, now go celebrate Life."

Harry asked from the other side.

He walked slowly up the stairs, finding himself a little worried about what he might find in the master bedroom. Would she be asleep? Would she be waiting for him? He reached the door to the room and stood nervously for a second before softly knocking on the door. "Who is it?" he heard Susan ask from the other side.

"Definitely awake", he thought. "It's Harry," he answered simply.

The door opened. "It's your bedroom, silly. You don't need to knock." Harry barely heard her, though, because of what she wore.

Susan stood before him in the same outfit she had worn that day in September - pale pink hi-leg knickers and a short, skin-tight tank top that made obvious just how prominent the girl's nipples could be. At the moment, extremely prominent. "Don't they hurt?" was the first thing that he blurted out.

She blinked in response before suddenly laughing. With a sultry look, she asked, "If I said yes, would you kiss them and make them feel better?"

This finally broke him from his shock, and he shook his head, smiling. "I will kiss anything you want me to, my lady." His eyes twinkled. "That reminds me. Didn't your aunt say that you'd bruised your bum?"

Her own eyes sparkled. "So if I was to tell you to kiss my arse –"

He snapped to attention and saluted her. "Yes, ma'am! Immediately, ma'am!" He relaxed and pulled her close to him hugging her tightly. "All kidding aside, Susan - whatever you want tonight is yours. If you just want to sleep, then we sleep. If you want to make love until the sun comes up, I'll endeavour to stay up all night. And I don't mean just staying awake."

"I know some of those spells, if you really want to, Harry, but I simply want to be held by you, and make love to you if you're willing."

He raised his eyebrows in disbelief. "If I'm willing?" he asked, then let his hands slide down her body to her shapely rear end and pulled her even tighter to him. "If I'm willing?" He slid his hands up slightly and then under the waistband and back down to where they'd been before. "I have every intention of slipping these knickers off of you and kissing every square centimetre below your waist." He felt her knees shiver slightly. "You might
"I promise to help you deal with it," she whispered in a voice with only one aim in mind. "I'll try to show you just what you mean to me, as well as what you do to me." With that, he slid his hands up and gently grasped the waistband and pulled down, slowly exposing one of the areas he has been fantasising about for these past few months. He was somewhat amused to discover that she was clean shaven.

"Simple charm," she answered a little breathily. "Easily reversible too."

"I'll leave that up to you. I definitely know you're female, and I don't care if your red hair is natural or a charm, or where you have hair." He knelt in front of her, then leaned forward and kissed the hairless area gently. "I'm not in love with your hair, I'm in love with the one wearing it." He kissed her again and then slid her knickers to the floor quickly before grasping her rear and kissing her pubic area more forcefully. "Shall we retire to the bed?" he asked. "If I do what I want to, your knees are likely to give out."

"Ah well, making her happy is the thing. And am I tasting strawberry?

He smiled at her and stood. Her lower lip quivered as she stared lustfully at the bulge in his trousers. As she reached to release him from durance, he kissed the hairless area gently. "I'm not in love with your hair, I'm in love with the one wearing it." He kissed her again and then slid her knickers to the floor quickly before grasping her rear and kissing her pubic area more forcefully. "Shall we retire to the bed?" he asked. "If I do what I want to, your knees are likely to give out."

She smiled and nodded. He was amused to note that her breathing was already quite fast. He stood quickly and swept her into his arms. "I look forward to doing this on our wedding night."

"Yes," he answered as he placed her on the bed. As he knelt again, he carefully cast a charm that he was fairly certain that she'd enjoy, and his tongue extended to about six inches past his lips. Grinning widely, he began to tease her opening gently with his longer tongue, make her writhe and squeal. He began to push in deeper, starting to draw moans from her. Soon, his lips were against her, and his tongue was doing the writhing.

She groaned and squealed as he used his tongue in place of his cock, thrusting into her. He found himself somewhat worried after he'd started that this had probably been a bad idea. No way I can live up to what I'm doing to her right now. Ah well, making her happy is the thing. And am I tasting strawberry?

He knew he found her G spot when she let loose with a noise that he couldn't classify, other than to note that she'd somehow panted and squealed at the same time. He began to 'torture' it with the tip of his tongue and toyed with it mercilessly, making her actually bounce on the bed. Suddenly she arched her back, and the fact that her legs were over his shoulders at the moment meant that only her head and arms were touching the sheets. Her hands clenched so tightly on the bedclothes that he was certain that they'd rip. Her pussy spasmed against his tongue, and he could taste her even stronger as her own release flowed across it. While not the flood of fluids that some of the things that Dudley had left around seemed to indicate would happen, it was an impressive reaction, and Harry gladly did what he could to keep it from dampening the sheets. Since his tongue was still inside her, this meant that she couldn't really come down completely.

He finally stopped trying to keep her orgasming and pulled his tongue out, wandlessly cancelling the spell on his tongue. She gasped for a while before finally managing to speak. "You have got to teach Luna and the others that spell, Harry! Dear Merlin that was intense! If that's how you are with your tongue, then I may not survive when your cock is inside me."

"You may find yourself disappointed," he said softly. "That part of the anatomy isn't prehensile, like my tongue is."

She sat up and pulled him closer to her. "Harry, you'll be making love to me. Things don't need to move interestingly to make it enjoyable." She bit her lower lip. "Since we're moving in that direction anyway …"

He smiled at her and stood. Her lower lip quivered as she stared lustfully at the bulge in his trousers. As she reached to release him from durance vile, he noticed something that made him start to laugh quietly. As she followed his eyes, her own widened as she looked at her breasts. Her shirt had apparently given up on the task of hiding her nipples, and they had torn through the fabric. At the moment, the fabric almost perfectly framed her areolas, which were fully distended, looking for all the world as if someone had bisected a handball and placed it beneath the flesh that surrounded her nipples. Those were equally large, as thick and long as Harry's thumb.

"I'll repair the shirt later," he murmured.

"Oh no you won't," she said with a smile. "I'm going to fix the shirt as it is, to commemorate the day that my husband to be made me rip through my shirt, he was so good."
Growing softly, he complied, pressing gently against her opening and sliding in quickly. Given how hard she'd been coming, he wasn't the slightest bit surprised that she was so well lubricated.

He slid into her in one slow movement with her groaning loudly at the end. "Please, Harry, I know you can make me come as many times as you want - don't torture me. Please?"

"I'm not trying to torture you, love. I want you to enjoy yourself."

She hugged him tightly with every muscle she had, and he groaned. "I want you to lose complete control. I don't want you to just come in me, I want you to explode - to empty your soul into me. I want to lose track of where I end and you begin."

He smiled for a moment as he pulled back and then began to thrust in earnest. She bucked her hips to meet him, and they were soon meeting with some force. She began to grunt with each thrust, and he could feel her starting to pulse against his cock. With a feral grin, he increased his speed, and the grunts became cries. He finally met her one last time with a resounding slapping as their bodies met. He felt himself twitching, and then he spilled into her. Their eyes met, and he felt himself falling. It wasn't Legilimency, he knew that much, it was much older, and much more primal. He truly understood what it meant to share a soul with someone.

He didn't know how long they lay there entwined in each other, but eventually they returned to their senses. "My goodness, Harry," she half breathed and half giggled, "I didn't know it had been that long. I may slosh when I get up!" He blushed but laughed as well.

"I… my God, I didn't know just how much I loved you until… there are no words for it, Susan." He could feel tears coming to his eyes - not of sadness, but simply from the sheer power of the emotion he was feeling.

"You don't need words, Harry." She hugged him tightly for a moment before exclaiming, "Whoops! Better let me up, Harry. I need to hit the loo." He quickly rolled off her and let her climb to her feet, where she shot into the bathroom. He stood as well and followed at a more leisurely pace, waiting for her to exit.

"You know, we got awfully sweaty in that bed. I think we ought to shower before going to bed." He grinned at her and wiggled his eyebrows lasciviously.

"And what were you thinking of, Mr. Potter?" she purred at him in a voice that made full use of the lower of the octaves that she could reach. She was stunned to find herself pressed up against the nearby bookcase a moment later with Harry's hand gently rubbing her slit. He was obviously taking great care to find her clitoris, which he did almost immediately. "Oh to hell with this - just fuck me Harry!" she pleaded.

"As my lady commands," he replied with a grin. He pressed her against the case and positioned himself properly. As he slid in, her legs came up and wrapped around his waist as best she could, while his hands grasped her shapely rear end tightly but not painfully. Surprisingly, this was a very rapid orgasm for both of them, and he found that she seemed to squeal when she came. He certainly wasn't going to complain about it, what with the interesting thrill that shot down his spine and directly into his groin every time he heard it.

They eventually made it in for a shower, where Harry chose to kiss her bruises away, and verify for himself that she did, in fact, taste like strawberries. This led to her being pressed against the glass wall of the shower but not before a wandless Cushioning Charm could be cast. Finally, they staggered out to the bed where they fell in, cuddling each other as they slid into sleep.

The next morning Harry awoke to find himself already inside Susan, although she seemed to still be asleep. He was fairly close to release but was able to hold off until her own impending release woke her, at which point he exploded within her.

"Feel free to wake me like that any morning you want to!" she panted at him when she could finally speak.

"I woke up to find out I was on autopilot, apparently." At her puzzled look, he simply said, "Later. Now, we should probably shower and get dressed for the day. I need to buy engagement rings for three very beautiful and sexy women." He kissed her gently.

Susan climbed from the bed and stretched, giggling when she realised that she had Harry's completely attention. His face held a look of wonderment, with not a little desire mixed in. "I'd have made a joke about where I fall in this if you're buying rings for beautiful women, but you might take me seriously and start to apologise."

"I'm still learning about being in love," he said honestly, climbing out of the bed himself. It was his turn to be amused as he saw her look of wonder.

"Can we agree that we're both the luckiest people in the world?" She nodded with a shy blush.

He murmured "Tempus," and the time **8:23 am, December 22, 1997** appeared in the air before him. "Still early enough. You take your shower first," he said, adding after a short pause, "love." Her face lit up, and he decided that if he received nothing else this season from her, he'd gotten the greatest present of them all - her happiness.

"We could save water and shower together," she said impishly, turning away and seductively looking over her shoulder.

He looked longingly at her before biting his lower lip and saying, "We need to get out of the house today, Susan. We probably wouldn't if I did that."

"Can't blame a girl for trying," she replied as she walked in to shower, swinging her hips a little more than usual.

"Rain check," he called out. "Definitely another time." He quickly gathered clothes together and then headed in to wait for her to step from the shower. When she did, she stepped into a large fluffy towel that he wrapped around her.
"Oh, Harry," she suddenly sniffled. She threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly. "I don't think I'll ever be able to say what that sort of thing means to me."

"Your smile is all I need," he replied. "Now you go out and dry off, I'll shower quickly, and then come out and deal with your hair." She looked at him curiously. "I'm joining the retinue of people dealing with everyone's hair. You four take care of each other, why shouldn't I join in? After all, I'm marrying you four." She blinked at him for a moment. "What, you think I'm marrying you four to gain house elves or something?" he asked with an impudent smile. She hugged him again, and he stepped into the shower.

He stepped out a few minutes later into the main room of the master suite to find her still nude, starting to run a brush through her hair. He smiled into the mirror she was facing and walked over to her, taking the brush from her hands and starting the process of pulling it gently through her long hair. He was surprised to find just how long it had gotten - it currently fell to her mid-back.

As the brush slid through the thick mane, he grinned as he heard her start to purr. He stole a glance into the mirror and saw that she had her eyes closed, to enjoy the experience all the more. He applied just a touch of magic to the process, and her hair began to dry at a slightly quickened pace. He thought for a few moments as he fell into the rhythm of brushing her hair and added a little extra magic to ensure that his drying wouldn't break or crack her hair, conditioning it as he worked. Finally he stopped and watched her open her eyes. She gasped to find that her hair almost seemed to glow, and he leaned in to kiss her neck. "I love you, Harry," she whispered, her eyes bright with unshed tears.

"I love you, too, Susan. I look forward to the next hundred years." He hugged her tightly and whispered to himself, "What I could have lost if I hadn't gotten my head out of my arse -"

"You wouldn't have lost us, Harry. We're yours and would have stayed with you no matter what. Besides, you were damaged by that bitch of a Weasley. We understood."

"Which bitch?" he asked quietly. "It's not like Ginny didn't learn it from somewhere."

Susan laughed, stood and turned to face him. "Point taken. Now we both need to dress and head downstairs." She walked over to an armoire and opened it to reveal some clothes. "Since I'm staying here until you return to Hogwarts, I decided that I needed some clothes here." She pulled out a soft-looking sweater and a knee-length skirt, then grabbed socks and shoes. As Harry slid on boxers, she noticed that she didn't seem to be pulling out underwear of her own.

"Um, Susan?" he asked, trying to figure out how to phrase it without offending her.

"I know. I want you to sneak a feel here and there, and when possible, a nice hard quick one wouldn't be amiss. Safer just not to wear underwear today, rather than leave bra and knickers somewhere in Diagon Alley."

"Friends with benefits, Harry. One of the benefits is discovering my adventurous side that only the other three girls know all about." He looked stunned, and found himself feeling a little hurt. It must have showed on his face, because she began to look puzzled. "Friends? I thought we were more than that," he said.

Comprehension dawned on her face. "I'll be marrying one of my best friends, Harry - possibly all of them, if they agree." He felt his own face relax into a wide smile. "I'm sorry, Harry. I didn't realise how that might sound."

"I'll try to learn to actually talk with you ladies, and we'll learn to avoid these things where I take something wrong. You're right, though - I'm marrying the four best friends that I have in the entire world." He pulled her into a hug. "And if that means I get to make love to you, then that's a benefit beyond imagining." He ran his hands along the sweater, finding it to be as soft as it looked, and then slid his hands under the material and cupped her breasts. "Hard as diamonds," he whispered as he teased his thumbs across her nipples.

"You make them that way, Harry," she moaned.

With an evil grin, he disengaged and said, "Well, time for breakfast. Shall we go downstairs?"

She bit her lower lip. "You'll pay for that. I'm going to make you so hard you'll be able to drive railroad spikes with your cock."

"Around you ladies, that's nothing new," he replied, letting the feelings he had for her come into his eyes for a moment. "I promise you you'll get that quickie sometime, even if it's in the vault at Gringott's." She gasped and began to chew on the lip she'd been biting. He swept her off her feet and carried her downstairs to the kitchen, first making sure that he had her skirt captured between her legs and his arm, lest she flash everyone in the kitchen.

He set her on her feet at the table, then pulled a chair for her to sit in. She blushed and sat daintily, smiling widely at him. He turned to make breakfast and found Amelia, Tonks, and Remus looking at them with amusement. Remus slid two bowls toward them. "Not much, just eggs and bacon. We'll get some toast ready, if you'd like."

"Sounds like an idea," Harry said. "And while we're eating, maybe somebody can finally explain to me just what the fu … hell happened at the school?"

There was silence around the table for a moment, before Amelia asked, "Do you promise not to go off half-cocked and attempt to deal with people on your own?"

"Ah, you have suspects," he replied. He closed his eyes for a moment before opening them and asking, "Answer me this - were Crabbe and Goyle on your own?"
Amelia thought for a long moment before saying, "Crabbe and Goyle were involved, and we know that others were, too, but they aren't saying who."

"Malfoy will kill them if they implicate any of the other Death Eaters in the school," Harry said quietly. "Are there any suspicions as to whom the other people involved were? There have to have been others involved, if only because Crabbe and Goyle need watchers to make sure they get everything done right. Or anything at all, for that matter. Malfoy is implicated by the fact that those two never even breathe without his approval, plus it fits with that article that Narcissa the-soon-to-be-nameless wrote to overlay on the real article. Since neither Momma or Baby Ferret were at the school that we know of, that means that they have a crony, most likely another Slytherin, since it would be easiest for Draco to contact another Slytherin without drawing attention."

"We think the most likely suspect to be Blaise Zabini," Amelia replied.

"Don't know her," he replied.

"That's because she's a he," Susan chuckled. "That black student in your Potions classes - tall, very quiet, looks like he knows more than everyone else? That's him." Harry nodded. "As for what happened, the article that Auntie told me about likely would have been true if not for Luna. We were walking back from Hagrid's hut, and we were just about to approach the doors when a large chunk of stonework - and when I say large, I mean large enough to crush the four of us into a single paste-y goo - a large chunk of stone fell off the castle."

"Sabotage," Harry said immediately. "I refuse to believe that a thousand year old castle that has never had that sort of problem before suddenly is starting to fall apart."

"That's what I thought too," Amelia said. "We were right. Just a matter of finding the wands that cast the severing charm on the stone."

"Anyway, Luna ... she must have heard it or something, because suddenly she was tackling me as she sideswiped the other two, and we fell just as the stone shattered behind us. I'll bet she didn't tell you that a chunk of stonework knocked her unconscious."

"No, she didn't." He thought. "It's a good thing, too. I'd have ... you know, I don't know what I would have done, but I know it wouldn't have been good for my psyche. That woman is brilliant, I realise that now." He smiled a soft smile. "How did I get so damned lucky as to get any one of you into my life, let alone all four of you?"

"The Universe owes you," Susan said simply. "Personally, I don't see myself as this great catch I defer to your judgement on that, though, since I know how lucky I am to be marrying you, and I'll bet you think that you're not that special."

"I'm not."

"Harry, you are the epitome of the hero. You are kind, noble, honest, horny ... uh, well, that last one may not be a heroic attribute, but it's one I enjoyed last night," her eyes twinkling with mirth. He shook his head. "One track mind," he said, sticking out his tongue.

"Don't do that unless you're going to use it for our mutual pleasure," Susan replied impishly.

"Now, or should I allow you some recovery time?" Harry asked, blushing furiously.

"I can wait," she purred. Everyone at the table was surprised when the piece of bacon Harry was holding exploded into flames. "Wow! I knew you thought I was hot, but ... wow!"

"It's that wandless stuff I've been doing all year. Remember, you have no bruises anymore, since I kissed them all away."

"Including the ones on her bum?" Tonks asked with a leering grin.

"Especially those," Harry replied with a faraway smile. He shook his head. "Well, Remus and I need to go out to do a little shopping. Care to come with us, Susan?" When he saw the impish look reappear in her eyes, he knew he'd said the wrong thing.

"I'll come with you," she growled seductively, "but I think Tonks might have a problem if I tried to come with Professor Lupin."

He wisely kept silent while everyone laughed at his blush - even Remus, who had his own surprised blush.

While Remus, Tonks, Susan and Harry headed off to Diagon Alley, Amelia Bones decided that it was time to make a visit to Narcissa and her son. She grabbed Kingsley Shacklebolt from the Ministry and briefed him on their mission. He grinned at the deviousness of it.

It wasn't so much that the spell that Amelia intended to use was unknown, it was that it was under a modified Fidelius Charm. Only the three people who were Secret Keepers could tell anyone of the existence of the spell. Even if Cornelius Fudge did know of the spell, he couldn't even begin to warn Lucius Malfoy or his family of its existence.
Amelia Flooed Narcissa Malfoy. “Mrs. Malfoy?”

“Yes, Director Bones? How may I help you?”

“We have a rather nasty and particularly vicious hoax having been perpetrated on someone that the Ministry is keeping an eye on, and this someone decided to try to implicate you.”

“I can’t believe that you would believe that I might be involved in something so childish!” Narcissa replied, beginning to work herself into a proper state.

“I didn’t say that I did. However, since it is an investigation, I was wanting if I could come over to do a preliminary interview with both you and your son. Routine sort of thing, and then assuming everything checks out, my associate and I can be on our way. I’d be surprised if we took even an hour of your time, Mrs. Malfoy.”

Narcissa thought for a moment, and Amelia was fairly certain that she wasn’t aware of the sly smile that began to grace her features. “By all means, Madam Bones. Feel free to drop by. I’ll have one of our elves meet you outside at the Apparation point for Malfoy Manor.”

“ Auror Shacklebolt and I will be along in just a few minutes. Until then, Mrs. Malfoy.” The connection closed, and Amelia cast several extra charms just to ensure that the connection was completely closed. “The look she got one her face tells me she was involved, and that she expects to get away with it. I’ll record the wand signatures while you perform the Priori Incantatem.”

He nodded, and they Apparated to Malfoy Manor.

A few minutes later, they were in the study, where both Narcissa and her son sat. Both their wands sat on a nearby table. “Ma’am,” Kingsley said quietly, and received the barest of nods.

“As you know, Mrs. Malfoy, we need to check out these rumours. The easiest way is simply to check your wands with Priori Incantatem. Auror Shacklebolt will perform the operation while I verify that nothing untoward is done during the examination. This protects both you and us.”

“I understand,” Narcissa said with a slight smile. “I believe the phrase that I have heard used is ‘by the book’?”

“Exactly,” Amelia responded. “Kingsley, if you would?”

Kingsley Shacklebolt picked up the wands and perform the spell, displaying a Wrapping Charm from Draco’s and an Illusion Charm from Narcissa’s. Amelia’s eye sparkled slightly. “An illusion was used in the hoax. For the sake of the investigation…”

Before she could finish, Narcissa chuckled with little humour. “Consider the season, Madam Bones.”

Amelia nodded. “Understood, and were it not for certain other evidence that you have given us, Mrs. Malfoy, I’d easily have to accept that as the excuse. On the other hand, your wand was the one that cast the illusions on the early copy of the Daily Prophet that was sent to Harry Potter, and it turns out that your son’s wand was involved with the incident that led to the original article being written in the first place. I can guarantee in your case that a fine at the very least will be levied once the Wizengamot sees the evidence, and your son is looking at spending some quality time with his father. We already have two of the conspirators and are closing in on a third.”

“You cannot prove your ridiculous allegations,” Narcissa said haughtily. “You will be hearing from my lawyer. I would make certain, were I you, that you have the things in your office packed. You will not be there for much longer.”

“You do that quite well, but bluster is all that you have. Our proof is incontrovertible. But by all means contact your lawyer - perhaps he can help you lessen that already significant fine you’ll be facing. In the meantime…” She quickly had the two in custody, before Draco could even twitch toward his wand.

She was actually whistling an hour later as they finished the paperwork on the two Malfoys that were now in custody.

####

Remus, Harry and Susan appeared at the Diagon Alley Apparation point, all smiling. “Gringotts first, right Harry?” the werewolf asked.

“Yup. Need money, and besides, since I have access to the Potter and Black vaults, maybe I can find a ring in there that makes Susan say, ‘Take me now, sub-creature!’ and I’ll end up saving some money.” He grinned impudently at her.

“You don’t need the ring to make me want to say that,” she said in the voice she’d recently discovered affected him the fastest.

“Do you really want the world to see that we’re coupled?” he groaned.

Remus snorted. “That was not the way you wanted to say that, I think,” he said through his laughter. “Thank Merlin I wasn’t drinking anything.”

“I meant exactly what I said, Remus. She knows what that voice does to me after last night.” She smirked at him as he took her into his arms. “You were a little surprised to find yourself against that bookcase.”

“Given what you were doing to me, I didn’t care after about three seconds,” she replied, kissing his lips gently.

They left the Apparation point and were immediately accosted by the glares of the wizarding public. Susan began to shrink slightly as the open hostility hit her, but Harry put his arm around her and said in a slightly louder than conversational tone, “Don’t let them bother you, Susan. These are the same idiots who will be singing my praises the next time the Daily Prophet needs me to be the saviour of the wizarding world.”
“What are you and your slut doing out amongst decent people, Potter?” Michael Corner sneered from nearby. “And where are the other three whores?”

Before anyone could react, Corner was against a wall holding his broken nose. Harry snarled at him, “Corner, I don't like you. I never have. I can deal with you saying anything you want about me. But if I ever hear you talk about any of my friends in such a manner again, I will make you look back on this broken nose as a fond memory.”

“What are you doing, Potter? You were never like this in Hogwarts!” came the somewhat smothered answer.

“That's because you were always after me alone. You don't touch my friends. End of statement.”

“What do you plan to do, Potter? Kill me?”

“For talking, no. Might break a bone or six. Threaten them? Make sure your will is made out.” He paused. “Don't think that I'm joking, Corner. I can take whatever shit you and the rest of the wizarding world wants to throw at me, since I've learned that you all require the Daily Prophet to do your thinking for you. You do not go after my friends, though. I will make you regret it,” he finished with a snarl.

With that, he turned back to Remus and Susan. Smiling brightly, he bent his arm and offered it to Susan. “My lady? Shall we continue to our destination?” He looked at Remus. “Good sir?”

Remus nodded and they began to walk down the Alley again. They were almost to Gringotts when they came across a small cadre of Aurors who were obviously waiting for them. Tonks was in the lead.

“Stand away from the werewolf,” one of the Aurors barked. “We're taking him in.”

Harry went cold, and Tonks actually shivered to see it. “On what charge?”

“For attacking someone,” came the response in a voice that declared that anyone who had to ask was obviously rather stupid.

“So, did Michael Corner tell you that Remus attacked him, or did you assume?”

“He's a werewolf!” shouted the same person, voice declaring that the verdict was now in and Harry was officially stupid.

“And you're an asshole! So what?” Harry ridiculed. “Only one of you is acting like your reputation, and it isn't Remus. Corner wasn't attacked by Remus, he was attacked by me. I broke his fucking nose and told him that if he attacked my friends again, I'd kill him. I'll bet that there are scores of witnesses up the Alley who'd be oh-so-willing to give their own proof that the Boy-Who-Lived is insane enough to say that in public.” He crossed his arms and stared at the Auror in question. “Go on, run along. Go do your job, if you remember how to do more than haul in whores?”

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“Thank you, Auror Tonks. Is it possible for me to level a complaint of unprofessional behaviour against an Auror? I'd really like to see him pay for his bigotry.” Harry scowled for a moment, and then walked over to the man. “With that attitude he's displaying…” Harry grumbled loud enough to
"I'm sorry about that," he said patting her back and realising that he still had no idea how to comfort a crying woman. When she seemed to have stopped crying, he felt her crying quietly against him. "I'm sorry, Harry. It's just a little overwhelming to realise that I'm marrying the richest wizard on the planet."

Harry rolled his eyes. "You have a lot of money, Susan. You could probably hire a whole bunch of people to do things for you so that you don't have to."

She shook her head. "I don't want to hire others to do things for me. I want to do things for others."

"That's the last I want to hear of that thought, Susan," he said with some annoyance in his voice. "I'm repeating myself, and being annoyingly poetic here as well."

"Harry, that pile alone is worth over a hundred million Galleons! And then there's a pile of a few thousand Claymores, and more Galleons than I could even begin to count!" She looked down and picked up a few silvery-white coins and asked, "What are these? I've never seen them before.

"Those are Claymores. It takes a hundred and one Galleons to equal one of them. I don't remember what that one over there is called." He pointed to a pile of pinkish-gold coins. "It apparently takes one thousand and thirteen Claymores to equal one of those."

"Harry, that pile alone is worth more than I am! It's worth more than I am!” She suddenly found herself over Harry's knees, her skirt pulled up, receiving several hard swats to her bum.

"I can't take this!” she squeaked. “It's worth more than I am!” She suddenly found herself over Harry's knees, her skirt pulled up, receiving several hard swats to her bum.

"Just an odd feeling, to be honest," Harry replied. "I figured that now was the best time to check - while he was unconscious."

"If I ask you to promise not to hurt anyone else, would you give me that promise?" Tonks asked him.

He looked at her for a moment. "I promise to start nothing, but I will finish it. I will also not become physical at purely verbal provocation." He looked down at Dickenson. "That promise is out the window if I see any of his kind around, though." At her look, he clarified, "Death Eaters."

She nodded. "I think I'll see to his incarceration and then look for you here in the Alley. No one can complain if you're walking with Auror escort."

"Well, they will, but at least they should consider you a guarantee of my being safe to be around. I have a couple things I really would like to get done today, but if it would help, I will come by the Ministry in order to be chewed out as I rightly should be."

Tonks chuckled. "No, with you dating her niece, I'd imagine you'll see Madam Bones and get a right chewing out from her. That should be punishment enough." Harry was amused to see two of the male Aurors shudder slightly at the thought.

He was finally released to finish his business in the Alley, and they quickly stepped into Gringott's before anyone could stop them. In short order, Remus was conducting his business while Susan and Harry rode to the Potter vault.

"You will likely need to remain outside the vault, Miss Bones," the goblin driver said. "Only those that are considered Potters by blood or marriage are capable of entering."

"What happens if I try and it doesn't consider me a Potter?"

"It simply will not let you through the door. The fatality rate in Gringott's is much lower than we tell people. It makes them less likely to want to break the rules." He grinned widely, looking as if he was displaying all his teeth.

At the vault, Harry climbed out and helped Susan out as well. He placed his hand on the door to unlock it and then motioned her forward. "I don't care what the wards might say, Susan. You and the other three are Potters in my eyes." He kissed her and stepped into the vault. She tentatively followed and crossed the threshold. Harry swept her into his arms. "See, I told you that you were a Potter." He kissed her gently and then turned to the contents of the vault. He'd gotten used to the piles of gold and silver in there, but he enjoyed the look of astonishment on Susan's face. "Just think, love. All this will belong to you and the other three soon."

"Harry, this is your money."

"And I'd gladly give it all away if it came to a choice between keeping you in my life or having money. I've found real love. Money just means I can keep you happy now." She melted into his arms.

"You don't need to worry about that, Harry. Just being where I am right now makes me happy." She gave him a quick squeeze and let go of him to look around the rather large vault. She reached down and picked up a few silvery-white coins and asked, "What are these? I've never seen them before."

He smiled. "Those are Claymores. It takes a hundred and one Galleons to equal one of them. I don't remember what that one over there is called."

"I told you, Susan. This means nothing to me, other than as a means to make you, Pansy, Luna and Hermione happy. If I have to spend it all to make you girls happy and comfortable, then it would be money well spent."

"Harry, that pile alone is worth more than I am! It's worth more than I am!"

"You're not a gold digger, Susan. Your reaction alone tells me that." He grabbed four bags and dropped ten of the pinkish coins in each one, and an equal amount of Claymores. He tossed her the red one. "There you go, Susan. It's all yours. Worth about a million Galleons. Open your own vault with it." He kissed her softly. "Your love is all the wealth I'll ever need."

"I can't take this!" she squeaked. "It's worth more than I am!" She suddenly found herself over Harry's knees, her skirt pulled up, receiving several hard swats to her bum.

"That's the last I want to hear of that thought, Susan," he said with some annoyance in his voice. "I'm repeating myself, and being annoyingly poetic in the process, which is so not me, but it's how I feel. This vault is worthless without you four. I was preparing myself for a very careful suicide when I saw the fake article. You four were dead. My life was not worth living. End of statement. If weren't for the damned Prophecy, I'd have taken my life right then and there." He shuddered and felt tears coming to his eyes. "Can you understand that, Susan? My life was gone. The women I loved were dead." He pulled her close and shuddered again. "Fuck all the money. The greatest treasure I have is in my arms."

He felt her crying quietly against him. "I'm sorry, Harry. It's just a little overwhelming to realise that I'm marrying the richest wizard on the planet."

"I'm sorry about that," he said patting her back and realising that he still had no idea how to comfort a crying woman. When she seemed to have stopped crying, he felt her crying quietly against him. "I'm sorry, Harry. It's just a little overwhelming to realise that I'm marrying the richest wizard on the planet."

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marriage never happened. It automatically declares any children of said union to be illegitimate. The requirement for it is that all parties be alive -

As they headed to the door, she pulled his arm back. Blushing furiously, she asked, "Would you spank me again later? I'm feeling really tingly right now, after that, and if we weren't keeping Remus waiting, I'd be using the money as a bed."

He grinned widely. "As my lady wishes." He paused and put twenty each of the Claymores and the other coins into a fifth bag that had the Black coat of arms on it. "Have a feeling I'm going to want this," he murmured to himself. They took the cart back up and met with Remus again in the lobby. They then left the bank. They had barely gotten off the steps when they heard loud bangs come from behind them and spun to see what had happened. A group of fifteen Death Eaters had appeared on the steps of the bank and were already firing into the crowd.

"Give me a fucking break!" Harry growled, pointing his wand at the group. Snarling, he barked out, "Reducto!" while aiming at a generic white-masked goon. The impact of the spell not only blew the man back several feet into the Death Eaters behind him, but it also blew a foot-wide hole through him. And the one right behind him. It didn't make it completely through the third one, but all three fell to the ground dead, even though their bodies weren't aware of this fact yet.

Harry turned to face the other Death Eaters. "I was kinder to her than she deserved. Who wants to volunteer for me to show what I wanted to do to her?" Susan had managed to stun three of them, and Remus had killed two more. The six remaining Death Eaters took one look at his implacable expression and immediately threw their wands down. "Spoilsports," he called just before casting six rapid-fire Stunners.

It was then that the Aurors showed up. The battle, if you could call it that, had taken no more than twenty to thirty seconds, not counting Bellatrix's taunts. The count was six dead, and nine stunned. "Feh, so much for my 50 percent or more total," Harry grumbled.

"It was our first time in action after the change," Remus said companionably. "I'd say your idea worked, though. Those six gave up without even trying."

"They're used to being fired on by stunners and the like. I don't think that they were prepared for the possibility that they might actually not return home from an attack."

The nine were taken into custody while others came to take possession of the bodies, and in short order the group was appearing in the Ministry, where they ran into the whistling Amelia Bones. "What brings you here?" she asked in surprise.

"Death Eater attack in Diagon Alley," Remus answered. "There were civilians injured, but I never saw the green of the Killing Curse. There are six dead Death Eaters and nine currently unconscious ones."

"Come to my office," Amelia said, and they were soon sitting comfortably. "So tell me what happened."

Susan explained what had happened from her point of view, admitting that she didn't know what had been done to Bellatrix. "That reminds me," Harry interjected. "I'll need to look up Tonks and Mrs. Malfoy to let them know that Bellatrix is dead."

As if the scene had been scripted, Tonks stepped through the door to Amelia's office after a discrete knock. "Madam Bones? We have the reports on those who died. None of them were subjected to the Killing Curse. Three were killed with a single Reducto while two others bled out after Cutting hexes. Lestrange was the unusual one, I have to admit. We can't figure out what was cast to kill her, but it pretty well shattered the rib cage over her heart. First time I've heard of ribs breaking in an outward direction."

"Who killed her?" Amelia asked.

"I used a Summoning Charm on her," Harry answered with a shrug. "More precisely, on her heart. I was angry at the time, so I put too much power behind it. I'd originally figured to make her stumble, or maybe pass out, but I'm not going to cry over killing that rabid dog."

"Nor should you," Amelia responded.

He turned to Tonks. "I need to speak to your mother soon," he said. "I need to do something I should have last year. In the meantime, however ..." He stopped and then drew himself erect. "Nymphadora Eileen Tonks ..."

"Tonks," the Auror interrupted with a grimace.

"Nymphadora Eileen Tonks," he repeated, "it is my sad duty as head of the Black family to inform you of the death of your aunt, Bellatrix Black Lestrange. She fell in battle, as a Death Eater." He relaxed. "Sorry, but that's required. Luckily, the only ones I have to tell are you, your mother, Narcissa, and Draco."

Amelia chuckled. "Those two are in holding cells downstairs. I have another question for you, regarding them. You were going to dissolve her marriage to Lucius, correct?" He nodded. "Do you want to dissolve it or deny it. The latter is an ancient legal fiction that legally states that the marriage never happened. It automatically declares any children of said union to be illegitimate. The requirement for it is that all parties be alive -"
no denying it after the husband has died.

"So if I deny it now, Draco becomes a bastard in the eyes of the law?" She nodded with a wicked smile. "So, what do I need to do to deny the marriage?"

"There is paperwork that needs to be filed." She reached into her desk. "Somehow, I found myself researching this and chose to examine the paperwork involved." She slid three sheets of paper toward him. "That's everything. You'll just need two witnesses, neither of them family."

He grinned. "Tonks? You willing to sign this before I un-disinherit your mum?"

Tonks's jaw dropped. "Are you serious?"

"No, I'm Harry. Sirius was my godfather," he responded with an impudent grin. "As for the other matter, yes. I intend to change the direction of the Black family name, even though there are no living Blacks anymore. To do that, I will eject the single remaining Death Eater and his possible Death Eater mother and reintegrate the woman whose marriage to a Muggleborn and the daughter that they had far more closely mirror the ideals of the previous head of the family and his heir, namely myself. In other words, welcome back to the family."

"Aunt, can both witnesses be from the same family?" Susan asked. At the amused nod, she said, "Auntie and I can witness your filing, and we can also witness your statement of intent toward Tonks and her mother."

"Maybe we should get Andromeda here, then," Amelia said. She walked to her fireplace and threw a pinch of Floo powder in. "Andromeda Tonks."

The green flames suddenly displayed a woman that was quite obviously the sister of both Narcissa and Bellatrix but more attractive than either due to the simple fact that she didn't have a permanent look of disdain on her face. "Madam Bones! What can I do for you?"

"Could you come through to my office? There is some news here for you, and you will likely want to hear it."

"It's good news, Mum!" Tonks said with a smile.

"Very well, I'll be there shortly." The flames returned to normal.

Harry turned to Tonks and said, "Well, now I know where you get your looks from." The Auror blushed in response. "What? It's true! Now I know what Narcissa or Bellatrix would look like without all that hate weighing down their souls. Your mother is a beautiful woman, and she and your father raised a beautiful daughter. And you're pretty, too." Tonks blinked for a moment before throwing her arms around Harry and sniffling.

"Thank you, Harry. You and Remus are the only men who seem to look beneath the surface and see the real me."

"That's because they both understand what it's like to be looked at for something you have no control over," a voice said in the doorway. They turned to see Andromeda Tonks standing there.

"Ah, Mrs. Tonks!" Harry said. "Thanks for coming. I have some bad news for you, but with it comes something I hope you will find to be good news." He frowned and took on the same aspect as he had with Nymphadora. "Andromeda Black Tonks, it is my sad duty as the head of the Black family to inform you of the death of your sister Bellatrix in a battle in Diagon Alley. She fought on the side of the Death Eaters."

Andromeda blinked back tears at the news of her sister's death, but then stood straighter. "You've declared me a Black again, haven't you?" At his nod, she threw her arms around him. "Thank you, Lord Black," she whispered.

"Hey, none of that," he said in a thick voice. "We're family now. As far as I'm concerned, you're my aunt." He reached into his pocket and pulled out the money bag with the Black seal. "You'll want to go to Gringotts with this and put it in your vault."

Andromeda quirked an eyebrow and looked into the bag, and then got even more puzzled. She pulled out of each of the coins. "What are these? I've never seen them before."

Harry grinned. "There are twenty of each of them. The pink ones are some name I don't remember, and they're worth one thousand and thirteen of the other coin, which is called a Claymore, which are worth one hundred and one galleons. Take them as a gift of the Black family."

Tonks gaped. "That's over two million Galleons right there," she gasped quietly.

"Not even touching what she's worth for raising a daughter like you, Nymphadora," Harry said. She was so surprised that she didn't even react to the use of her given name.

"No adding to the harem, Harry," Susan chided him with a smile. He gave her a confused look in response, and her smile brightened even more. "Have I told you recently that I love you, Mr. Potter?"

"At least I developed the intelligence to listen," he said with a lopsided smile.

"That you did, Harry," Amelia said. "By the way, those coins you don't know are called Schooners. That's quite the gift you gave Mrs. Tonks." She looked at Susan, who was blushing furiously. "From Susan's look, should I assume that she has received a similar gift?" Susan blushed to match her hair.

"She's remembering the chastisement she received for saying that she wasn't worth it. I put her over my knee." While it wasn't physically possible, Susan seemed to be trying to beat her previous colour.
"That sounds like an interesting story there, Harry," Tonks choked out around a snort.  "Like the one that would explain that interesting howl I heard over the summer, during the full moon?"  Harry was treated to the sight of Nymphadora Tonks's own blush rising in her face, and not stopping once it reached her hair.  He snorted his own laughter and said, "Well, let me get my paperwork done, and then we can head down to the holding cells and inform the future Miss No-name about my decision."

Andromeda Tonks looked at him for a moment before saying, "She stepped over the line, I assume?"

"She was directly involved in an attempt to make me believe that the four people that mean the most to me had been killed."

"An interesting side note, Harry," Amelia added.  "It appears that Draco's wand was the one that sliced the stone from the castle wall."

The sharp intake of breath from Harry was followed by a slow breath out.  He breathed in normally before saying quietly, "I will not kill him in cold blood, no matter how good it will make me feel.  The ladies would be unhappy if I missed our wedding."  He shook his head.  "Paperwork.  Deny the marriage first, and then disown her."  He cocked his head.  "Will that leave Draco as a Black, or will I need to expel him as well?"

"Best expel them separately," Andromeda said.  "That way he can't surprise you by making a claim, and the worst that has happened the other way, at least from your point of view, is that you might have done unnecessary paperwork."

A short time later, after the official paperwork had been filed (by Madam Bones herself, as to ensure no 'accidental' misplacement of the forms), a small group headed down to the holding cells.  Harry stopped before Narcissa's cell and stood tall.  "Narcissa, I have three important announcements for you, all coming from House Black, which is why there are witnesses, to verify that the messages were delivered.  First, it is my sad duty to inform you that your sister Bellatrix has died in battle, fighting for her half-blood master.  Her death was quick but was likely extremely painful.  My second announcement is to inform you that the marriage contract between the Malfoys and the Blacks has been denied.  As far as the law is concerned, your marriage to Lucius never happened."

"What?" bellowed Draco from the cell next door.  "You can't do that!"

"Quiet, Mr. Black," Amelia said sharply.  "He can and has.  I filed the paperwork myself."

"Silence, Draco," Harry said in such an imperious voice that the young man was stunned into silence before he could say a word.  "My third announcement is to expel you from the Black family, for shaming the family by not only being a party to the murder of the previous head of family, but for your part in the attempted murder of those who will soon join the Black family by marriage.  You were quite certain that the article that you wrote would likely make me suicidal, didn't you?"

"You vile, mudblood lover," Narcissa snarled.  "You've destroyed the Black family for now, but when the Dark Lord finally raises your head on a pike in Diagon Alley, we will finally return to our prior glory.  Your whores will be put to their proper uses for the rest of His followers before they are killed and thrown to the garbage heap where they belong!"

"Huh!" Harry said calmly.  "I thought it was from Lucius that the Amazing Ferret Boy over there learned his inability to keep his mouth shut.  It turns out that it was from the Slut Princess here."  He turned to Andromeda.  "Sorry, that was overly crude."

"But true," Andromeda said.  "If not for contraceptive potions, I'd have been an aunt about thirty times over.  That only counts the different potential fathers, mind you.  She started at twelve in her first year at Hogwarts.  Best way to control a boy and get what you want."

"Don't think you won't join him on a pike, sister," Narcissa snarled.

Andromeda looked coldly at Narcissa.  "I have no living sisters, Narcissa No-name.  You have been cast from the family and your son declared a bastard.  Unless Lucius claims him, you won't even have the Malfoy monies to fall back on.  You are alone, woman, as you have always deserved to be."  Andromeda and Nymphadora turned and walked down the hallway.  He puzzled over Andromeda's further comment of, "I'd rather be mounted on a lance than a pike," and Nymphadora's embarrassed squeak in response.

Harry ignored Narcissa and walked before Draco's cell.  "Here to gloat, Potty?"

"Draco, I have come to inform you that as of this moment, the Black family is no longer yours - you have been cast out.  When all is said and done, you will have reaped what you have sown.  You will die alone and friendless, with no family name."  He turned and walked away from the holding cells, head held high.
"How was I supposed to know her father's middle name was Lancelot?" Harry asked with a red face. His fiancées surrounded him, laughing. "Who gives their child that kind of a middle name in the Muggle world?"

Her eyes sparkling with mirth, Dorothy Granger asked, "Perhaps the same type of people who would name their child 'Hermione'?"

"Given one of the sources for that name, milady, would that your name were Helen," he said with a flourish.

"Nice save," Hermione murmured as they watched her mother blush. "Why are you so poetic recently?"

"Being in love tends to lead to bad poetry, I understand. At least I'm not writing Vogon poetry," he replied. Hermione and her mother shuddered theatrically.

Pansy sidled up next to him. "At least all your poems aren't about various body parts, unlike with the Amazing Bouncing Ferret-boy," she said. "He thought it was cute, or erotic, or something."

"Knowing him, I'm betting on 'or something'." Harry frowned. "I somehow don't believe that we've seen the last of either him or Narcissa. At least they aren't family anymore."

Dorothy frowned. "Are you sure they were trying to make you commit suicide?"

"It's the only thing that makes sense. Narcissa is smarter than her son - to be honest, the only thing dumber is Crabbe and Goyle (and I know that I described them as a singular 'thing') - and she had to know that it would be discovered if I didn't take myself out, since I'd rapidly realise that the article that they wrote was a fake. After all, although I may hate the paper, I continue to read it, and they'd certainly be able to request access to the subscription records. Therefore, logic says that they meant for me to despair and kill myself immediately after reading the article. That's part of the prosecution, I understand. Narcissa will have to decide whether she wants to be thought of as stupid or evil. The fact that her son's wand was used in the attack on your daughter will help as well."

"It's Christmas Eve, though," he finally announced. "Enough of the talk about annoying things. On to the fun things."

"Not in front of my parents!" Pansy giggled, drawing a laugh from everyone as Harry fought to keep the blush from overtaking his face.

Rallying, Harry replied, "Well, there goes the entertainment for the night. Good night, folks!" He turned and left the room. There was stunned silence for several moments before Fred and George Weasley stood and began to clap.

"Masterfully done, Harry!" Fred exclaimed.

"Encore! Encore!" George added.

Harry stepped back into the room, bowing as he grinned at them. "Couldn't resist that," he said to his now laughing guests. Pansy was shaking a fist at him, but the grin on her face told her real feelings. "Seriously, folks, I'm looking forward to Christmas here. Christmas is for real families, and without getting overly maudlin about it, this will be the first year I'll have been with people I consider family."

"We can go, considering …" Fred started to say.

Harry cut him off. "If you were serious the other day, I can actually adopt you into the Black family with minimal problems. With all of these witnesses, it makes it that much easier." He paused for a moment. "You can completely forsake the Weasley name, or you can merely be added on to the Black family. I'd recommend the latter decision, myself."

"After what they did to you, I'm actually a bit surprised by that," Keith Granger said. "Why?"

"Family is everything. I'm in no mood to be forgiving with them right now, but family …" He stopped to try to find the best phrasing. "I grew up with relatives, not family. The Weasleys are a family, no matter what may have recently happened. They love each other, and they care for each other. You could even say that this whole thing came out of a perverse sense of that, since they had nominally adopted me, which may be why they so viciously went on the attack against me when Bill and Charlie lied. If they can actually learn from this, then it's worth it for Fred and George to keep ties with them. I seriously doubt I'll ever reach the point where I'll trust them as much again, but I'll be damned if I'll see the relationship between blood members of the family go away without some chance at reconciliation between them."

"You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din," Keith replied.

"Nah, I'm just love starved. Attention starved too, if you believe the Daily Prophet."

Fred and George laughed. "Which you obviously haven't been doing in the last two days," George said. "Madam Bones had a long talk with the owners of the Daily Prophet, and suddenly they like you again."

Susan smiled - an evil looking thing - before starting to speak. "I think Auntie pointed out that since they were getting information on you from two people who are being questioned in regards to a series of potentially fatal actions regarding you, they could be considered liable and made part of the lawsuit that you might choose to level against Narcissa and the Malfoy fortunes." She laughed momentarily. "It seems that they decided to change their tune after that. You're back to being the golden boy, and they even printed a front page apology to you."
"For all the good it will do. Something else will come up, and they'll hate me again in a few days." He shrugged. "Part of why I just may leave the European wizarding world once Snake Lips is gone, at least for a while." Shaking his head, he looked at the twins. "So, what's your decision?"

"Our worst problem is that we have name recognition now," Fred said. "I know it's so …"

"…out of character for us to think …" George continued.

"… seriously, but this is our livelihood. Pranking is serious business!"

"Well," Harry said slowly, "I have the feeling that the Weasley name is not going to help you much for a little while, if the Prophet is being honest right now. You could always put up signs saying that you're changing your name. 'Great new name - same great taste' sort of thing."

"Yeah, but we haven't come up with anything that would work," Fred said.

"How about 'Marauder's Magical Mayhem'?" Harry asked with a grin. "All you'd have to do is turn your sign upside-down, considering that all it has is three W's."

George snorted. "Not quite how it works, but …" He thought for a moment. "Then again -"

"So, our apparently not so silent partner, do you recommend this?" Fred asked.

"You two are the ones with the head for business and pranks. I don't care if I owned the entire business, it's your genius that got it moving."

Fred fidgeted a bit. "Um, actually, as far as the Ministry and the goblins are concerned, we work for you. All the money came from your Tri-Wizard winnings."

Harry scowled. "This is your business! Would it cause problems if I were to give it to you for Christmas?"

"Tax-wise? Yeah," George said. "I'm not worried about being your employee, though."

"Well, we'll talk about it later," Harry said. "In the meantime, let us enjoy our Christmas together." They moved the gathering into the ballroom, and the party got fully underway.

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As the party broke up and the others drifted off to their bedrooms, three of the girls walked over to Harry while Luna finished talking with her father.

"We talked about entertainment for the night," murmured Pansy, "and Hermione, Susan, and I decided that it was time for you to entertain Luna. If you don't mind, we could even watch."

Harry was astonished at just how aroused that thought made him. He knew that someday he'd have to get used to it, but he hadn't expected it to be this soon. "Has Luna been made aware of this decision?" he asked in a husky voice.

"What decision?" the girl in question asked as she walked over to the group, her father leaving the five students alone as he headed for bed.

"We were thinking that it was your turn to be ravished by our Sex God husband," Pansy said. In response, Harry began doing over-the-top muscle poses. There was one problem with this mini-prank, however. In his own mind, he still saw himself as the scrawny eleven-year-old that had started Hogwarts. He had grown since then and put on muscle in all the right places. The girls were transfixed for a moment since he no longer tended toward loose clothing.

"Luna, if you don't take him to bed, I'm going to," Hermione said after a few moments of Harry's posing. Her voice made it clear that she was contemplating the removal of his clothes right there in the hallway.

Harry blinked at this reaction but shook it off as he looked at Luna. The woman was torn between letting Hermione have her way with him, or asserting herself. His mind went back to a conversation nearly two months earlier, and he smiled. He crouched for a moment, and when he rose, she was over his shoulder. Turning to look at what he could see of her, he murmured, "Gods, what a delightful arse." Much louder, he said, "You're mine, wench, and I intend to have my way with you tonight." He could hear her gasp, and it certainly sounded delighted to him. He stalked toward the master bedroom, the others behind him. As he approached it, he wordlessly opened it. Stepping in, he cast a Cushioning Charm on the mattress for extra safety before walking to it and dropping her onto it. She bounced once, giggling as she did, and he released the charm, following it quickly with a spell that made silk ribbons snake out from the bedposts and wrap around her wrists. He smile inwardly as he heard the very faint moan escape the blonde's lips.

"Well, now I've got you where I want you, my beauty," he said quietly. "And would you care to know something else? There will be witnesses to what I'm going to do to you." Luna's moan got louder, and it was by no means one of fear.

"Oh dear, I seem to have forgotten something in my haste to get you tied to the bed." He reached over and gripped the edges of her blouse, near the buttons, and tore them apart violently. The blouse ripped, sending buttons flying and exposing the lacy white brassiere that she wore.

"No, please," she suddenly cried out softly as Harry began to loom over her, and he suddenly exploded backwards off the bed, actually slamming up against the door fairly hard. She started at the sound and looked up, puzzled. "Harry? What happened?"

"I'm sorry Luna," he said with horror in his eyes. "I never meant to … oh my God …" He began to slide down the wall, curling in on himself with his
arms coming over his legs.

"And that, boys and girls, is why safe words are important," Pansy murmured as she freed Luna from her restraints. Luna leapt over to Harry and took hold of his arms.

"Harry! Come out, please. Please, love." She pulled hard on his arms and surprised everyone by successfully opening his grasp. He continued to fight to close his arms, but she pressed her body against his. "Harry!"

His arms tightened around her. When he realised that he was pulling her against himself, he stopped. "Why, Luna? I was … I'm no better than Draco!"

"No Harry," she said softly. "We made a mistake, that's all. I trust you, and all I was doing was getting into character."

"You need a word," Pansy interjected. "A word you'd never say during sex. Something like Voldemort or Azkaban or even kumquat."

"This is Luna," Susan mentioned around a smothered giggled. "I can imagine her screaming out the word 'kumquat' in the throes of passion."

"Well, I'll be damned if Azkaban or Voldemort have anything to do with my sex life," Harry said quietly. He held her at arm's length for a moment. "I need to know. You really weren't complaining?"

"I was getting involved with it, beloved. Next time that we decide to do this, let's use the word 'kumquat' as our word to signify that one or the other should stop." She shot a mock disparaging look at Susan. "Despite scurrilous rumours to the contrary, I am not likely to scream 'kumquat' during an orgasm." She paused for a beat before adding, "Snorkack' maybe, but not kumquat."

Harry snorted. "I can just see that. You scream out, 'Snorkack!' and your father comes bursting into the room shouting, 'Where? Where?'. Wouldn't that be an amusing end to a lovemaking session?" He pulled her close and kissed the top of her head. "I'm sorry about what happened, Luna. It's just that-"

"You have bad memories of what was done to you and were afraid that you were about to do the same to me," she replied. "Hence 'kumquat'."

He grinned and waved his hand. The buttons came back, and her shirt repaired itself. Standing, he asked, "Mind if we start again?" She looked shy for a moment before nodding, and he kissed her sweetly. He looked into her eyes and then stood, helping her to her feet at the same time. They smiled at each other, and he suddenly threw her over his shoulder and headed to the bed again. Eyes twinkling, he turned his head and let his teeth graze her bum. "My God, you're magnificent." She went flying onto the bed, giggling as she sailed through the air, the Cushioning Charm once again protecting her as she hit.

The silk bonds once again tied her to the bed, but not too tightly, and he again ripped her blouse open—lovingly, if such a thing could be done in such a manner. This time he let his fingers slide gently across her soft skin. She was wearing a lacy bra, and he could feel his blood pulse insistently below his waist. She was not what the average male would call beautiful, but those who bothered to look beneath the surface discovered a magnificent woman there. And he had to admit that she really did fill out her clothes quite well.

His fingers teased the silken flesh he'd exposed, drawing moans from her. He grinned and began to kiss the exposed skin, starting at her neck, drawing moans from her. He kissed, nibbled, and dragged his tongue along her chest but not touching the bra. He moved to below the bra and began to nibble the skin there. As a moan escaped her lips again, he repositioned himself over her bra and took it in his teeth. Letting a little magic escape, he bit through it between her breasts. "Gods, I have wanted to do that so many times," he whispered.

"Glad to have granted your fantasy," she giggled in response.

"Shush, you," he murmured as he began to kiss and nibble on her breasts. He finally relented when she was moaning and pleading with him and surrounded a nipple with his lips, intentionally grazing it with his teeth. He bit perhaps a little harder than he would with one of the other girls, but the result was well worth the different approach. She bucked beneath him, and he found himself wondering if she'd just orgasmed. He repeated it and got a similar reaction, so he moved to the other nipple and actually received a sound that was somewhere between a scream and an extremely erotic groan.

He grinned and reached under her skirt, finding her knickers absolutely soaked. He could even feel something as his fingers touched her opening through the cloth, and was fairly certain that he had made her come. He slid his hands up to the waistband and let his magic flare again before tearing the damp knickers off. "It's time, woman, that I take what's mine."

"Oh Morganna yes!" she whispered, almost sobbing. "Always and forever it's yours."

He quickly undid his own clothing and raised her skirt. She still had a small amount of hair, and he smiled. He straddled her and placed the head of his shaft against her. "Last chance, Luna. This is the one time I'll never play act or anything."

"Please, beloved," she whispered. "Make me your woman." With that, he began to slide into her, getting surprisingly deep within her before feeling a slight pull. With his second stroke inwards, their bodies met. He kissed her roughly on the mouth and felt her respond with equal passion. "Fuck me, Harry."

He needed no further urging and began to thrust into her in earnest. She immediately began to rise to meet him on his in-thrusts. Her unbridled passion brought the beast within him to the fore, and in short order their bodies were slapping together with Harry growling quietly with each erotic impact. Suddenly Luna arched and lifted Harry from the bed completely as she began to release a keening wail. He answered with a guttural howl and one final thrust as he gripped her hips tightly, small involuntary thrusts trying the impossible— to bury himself even deeper inside his blonde lover.
Harry staggered from the room before light began to come in the windows. It was Christmas morning, and he wanted everything perfect. He entered the kitchen to find Dobby and Winky hard at work. "Happy Christmas, you two," he said brightly.

"Master Harry!" Dobby squeaked. "We is almost ready, but breakfast is not being ready yet! Dobby is sorry."

"Don't be. I got up early on purpose. I ask a lot of you two and want to help you in any way I can." He remained silent as he watched Dobby and Winky confer with their eyes before Winky finally said, "We's not had time yet to set the table, Master Harry." It was obvious that it had been a fight for her to allow this.

"Thank you, Winky. I would never dream of trying to make you not work, but consider it my Christmas present to you that I will try to lessen your workload today, to let you enjoy the festivities as well. You are part of my family as well." He gave her a quick hug before setting to the task of preparing the table.

It was only a few minutes later that he heard someone say, "Now that's a wonderful sight." He turned to see Remus leaning against the doorframe with quite a few of the other adults behind him. "You were humming, Harry, and I can see the smile. You're in a good mood, and I for one am glad to see it."

"Why shouldn't I be happy? I have four women who are crazy enough to love me back, and I'm having my first ever Christmas with friends and family." He paused. "Well, first one that I can remember. Last one, my most memorable word was likely, 'Goo.'"

"As I recall, it was 'Abba', which both parents claimed was you trying to refer to them. Sirius tried to claim it was you trying to say 'Padfoot', and I simply said it was a sign of your music preference." There was a sound behind Remus, and Harry looked to see Dorothy chuckling into her hands. "Nice to see my Muggle Studies classes didn't go to waste," Remus finished.

Finally, Pansy, Luna, Susan and Hermione came downstairs, smiling widely. "Thank you," Luna whispered as she hugged him good morning. "Thank you for making my fantasy come true."

"It was my pleasure, beautiful," he whispered back. He moved his head and kissed her gently on the lips, for which she sighed contentedly when the kiss broke. This was repeated with the other the ladies, who also sighed as their kiss ended.

For Harry, this Christmas was a day not for giving or receiving, although there was plenty of both for everyone. (The Grangers were just starting to understand what it meant to be adding someone who was both love-starved and extremely wealthy to their family.) He was found with the hint of tears in his eyes throughout the day, each time looking in at the happy gathering amassed in his home.

"I'm sorry," Albus said that evening. He had shown up at some point during the afternoon. "It is only in retrospect that I see how badly I have done by not paying closer attention to your living conditions."

Harry turned to him and smiled. "Then again sir, if you had, things might have ended up differently, and I might be engaged to Ginny Weasley right now. Instead, I have four women who have shown me what real love is who are waiting to be able to marry me. If I could, I'd marry them today."

"Why can't you?" Albus asked with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Well, for one thing, we've done nothing to properly set up for a wedding. They have their engagement rings, but no wedding rings. No wedding dresses. And... well, I want their weddings to be memorable, sir, not some thing just thrown together on the spur of the moment. They deserve a wedding that will live forever in their memories as the most special day of their lives."

Pansy walked up behind him. "Harry, I'll be marrying the only man not already part of my immediate family that I'd lay down my life for without thinking about it. It's not wedding dresses and cakes and other things that make the day precious. I'd marrying you naked, if it meant that I'd go to bed tonight as Mrs. Potter."

"No naked weddings," Susan giggled. "Harry would be consummating the marriage before the 'I do' was finished."

"She knows me so well," Harry laughed quietly. "Seriously, though. Don't all women want the big wedding with the white gown and everything?"

"Not all women," Pansy said softly. "All I've ever wanted for my wedding was a man who loves me. And despite everything I've earned so far, I've found that exactly that. I'd marry you this very instant, no extra ring or anything, Harry." Tears sprang to her eyes. "I could die happy if it was as Mrs. Potter."

"Preferably after watching our great-grandchildren enter Hogwarts," he said into her hair as he hugged her tightly. "And I argue about you having earned worse," he whispered into her ear. "Shakespeare said something like, 'Give each man his due, and who would escape a whipping?' We've all done things that earn us a little time in Hell. I love you, and that's that."

"I like that idea," Susan said, not having heard Harry's quiet addition to Pansy. "Dying peacefully in my sleep after a long life with the man and women that I love, after watching all our great-grandchildren leave Hogwarts." Her eyes sparkled, letting everyone know that she had intentionally changed Harry's statement.
“But what about a big wedding?” Harry said.

Hermione looked around. “I think we have everyone we’d really trust to invite anyway, right here. Do you want a big wedding? All I’ve ever wanted since I was old enough to understand it was to walk down the aisle and bind myself to the love of my life. The only thing I got wrong is that it happens to be plural. I could be happy standing here right now and saying ‘I do’ to the four of you.” She met Harry’s eyes. “The big expensive wedding means nothing if I’m not marrying the right one, or ones, as the case happens to be.”

Luna simply said, “They speak for me, Harry. When you’re ready, I stand ready.”

He paused for a moment before saying, “Well, Headmaster? Do you know someone capable of marrying us before the day is out?”

“Why, I believe that I do,” Albus responded. “It just so happens that I know the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot. I believe that he stands ready to perform such a ceremony at your convenience.”

Harry shook his head. “Well, since I am outnumbered on this, and am not stupid enough to fight something that I really want, I think that we should meet down here again in about an hour. That gives us all enough time to get dressed in something nice. Sound good to you?” His answer was to hear a four person “Squee!” that left him hugged mightily and abandoned to the adults a moment later.

Once they were out of the way, he walked to the kitchen and sat down. Closing his eyes, he concentrated, and the rest of the people could feel power building. Suddenly, the two chests that he and Susan had pulled from Gringotts sat on the table before him. He opened them and began to sift through them but quickly scowled. “Not good enough,” he muttered, not seeing both Remus and Albus look at each other with eyebrows raised.

Some of the jewellery in the chests could be sold to make a significant down payment on a mansion. Harry closed his eyes and began to concentrate again. In very short order, those who were watching were forced to leave the room simply because of the feeling of immense pressure within the room. Several moments later, the feeling went away, disappearing as if all the air in the room had simply disappeared. As they re-entered, they found a tired Harry looking at five simple rings of an almost white substance.

Albus walked forward and examined them with his eyes, and suddenly stood and staggered back. “Gracious!” he exclaimed. “If I did not see it myself, I might not believe it.”

Harry looked up. “None of the rings in the chests were good enough, so I had to make them. I figured it would be easier on me to make them all at one go, rather than one at a time. Now, I just need to make them automatically resize to the finger they’re going on, and add a few protective spells …”

“Might I be permitted to do that, Harry?” Albus Dumbledore asked. Harry nodded and headed up to the master bedroom to get ready.

After Harry had exited the room, Remus looked at Albus and asked, “What had you so surprised?”

“Look carefully at the five wedding rings that our young friend has created and tell me why I was so surprised.”

Remus looked carefully at the rings. They were definitely metal, but he’d never seen metal like this before. It resembled platinum, but the colour was off slightly. He pulled his wand and cast a few simple information spells over them. The result made his eyes widen. “How … this metal … what did he do?”

“I believe that our soon-to-be-married man has read Tolkien. My suspicion is that he has just invented mithril. Did you note the material’s willingness to accept spells?”

“I couldn’t get past the fact that it radiates how magical it is to be honest, sir.”

“Understandable.” Albus opened his mouth to speak again but heard thundering feet coming down the stairs.

Harry burst into the room. “Forgot something important,” he gasped out. “Remus, I need a best man.”

“Looking for suggestions?” the werewolf replied, eyes sparkling with mirth.

“Prat,” Harry replied with a laugh. “Since Dad and Sirius aren’t around, I can’t think of anyone better to stand in their place. Please?”

Remus scowled at him, but his eyes were twinkling madly. “It’s bad enough you hit me with the pathos card, but then you do puppy-dog eyes at me? That’s rather unfair, Harry!”

“You’ll do it, though?” Harry asked impudently.

Remus pulled Harry into a hug. “Of course I will, under the understanding that I’m simply standing in James’s stead, okay?”

Harry laughed after returning the hug and headed back upstairs to finish getting ready. Remus shook his head in wonder. “For someone who … this is proof of what these women are to him. Look at how he feels right now. I know that he hasn’t forgotten what the Board of Governors did to him and Amelia. But -”

“He’s acting this way because our daughters give him a sense that everything will turn out for the best,” Lawrence Lovegood interjected. He’d been quiet, watching the others interact and watching the way that his daughter lit up around the other four. He’d known for years that she acted oddly around others. It was her defense mechanism. He supposed that his newspaper and its odd articles didn’t help matters any either. His belief in
some of the odd things certainly didn’t. “From what I understand, the previous six years were passable. His friendship with Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger helped him through the worst of the problems. Then Ronald managed to pull Miss Granger away for a time, and he had Miss Weasley to help him, supplemented by Miss Parkinson here.”

“Please, sir, I’ll be your daughter-in-law soon. You should probably get used to calling me Pansy,” she interrupted, drawing attention to her presence in the room.

Dumbledore smoothly removed the rings from view.

“Only if you call agree to call me Lawrence, or maybe come up with some pet name for me. It can even be flattering,” he said with a smile, which drew a laugh. “As I was saying though, the presence of the two of them helped him through a period when he was deprived of his original support. His worst period, likely, was the three weeks during which no one his age was available due to the Weasley treachery.”

“Even that was probably helped a little bit by my not pulling a Weasley and declaring him wrong immediately,” Hermione interjected as she walked back into the room. “At the time, I simply could not believe that Charlie and Bill would do that, but I also couldn’t believe that Harry would either. He asked me to sit on the fence, so I did.” Her face fell. “And then I did nothing, expecting the truth to just drop itself into my lap, gift-wrapped.”

“The four of you have done wonders for the young man,” Lawrence said, “and what the four of you have done for my daughter is beyond price. She has never been this happy before, and there is no way I can ever thank you enough for that.”

“I never thought that I could fall in love with one woman, let alone three,” Hermione said. “Her happiness means everything to us as well, sir … Lawrence.”

“And we’ll all be deliriously happy in a few more minutes,” Luna added quietly, “after we pledge ourselves to each other.”

The ceremony was simple, but no less profound for its simplicity. Harry’s wives all gasped when they saw the rings, and as they all pledged to each other, a flare went from ring to ring, until they had formed a pentacle. “Truly, this union is blessed,” Albus said. “I have never seen such a thing in my lifetime, nor read of it. But I can say with surety that it is good.”

The five came together and kissed, and a bright white flash filled the room, filling all present with hope and happiness. When their vision cleared, they found Harry and the others holding hands, the bright line from each ring to the other four still a brilliant gold.

“I can feel you four,” Pansy said in wonder. She looked at each of them and burst into tears. “I never … You can say it all you want, but …”

“Maybe now you’ll believe me,” Hermione said, kissing Pansy sweetly. “I told you that I love you.”

“Now maybe you four can truly feel what it is that you mean to me,” Harry said softly. “Why my life was worth nothing when the Malfoys tried what they did.” He kissed each of them softly. “My beloved wives,” he said, his voice nearly breaking with emotion.
"So the Daily Prophet has decided again that I'm worth knowing," Harry mused a few mornings later at breakfast, "and they're calling for the Board of Governors to rethink their policies, despite being the ones who were pushing for having me expelled in mid-December." Dobby and Winky bustled about in their usual manner, refilling glasses of milk and juice, and just generally ensuring that the only way anyone left the table hungry was because they wanted to.

"That's about it," Remus replied. "Business as usual for them."

Harry scowled for a moment. "I wonder if Pansy's father might be interested in forming a partnership to buy the Prophet and do something unusual with it, such as making it report fairly."

"Wouldn't reporting fairly violate their charter or something?" Pansy asked, her tone leaving no room for discussion about her opinion.

"After I own it, who cares?" Harry asked. He looked to Amelia. "So what's the Board doing now that the Prophet has decided to switch sides?"

"They are currently trying to find a way to get rid of your punishment at their hands without making themselves look bad. Of course, since they censured me for supporting you, they are discovering that it is an uphill battle." She smiled nastily. "It will continue to remain so, until they find themselves willing to accept and admit that they bowed to pressure to oust you."

"I'm not worried," he said. "I'm returning to the castle on the same day as everyone else."

"We're not taking classes either," Pansy added. "We girls talked it over, and we're supporting Harry. Until he's reinstated, we work as a team."

"Besides, it gives us all extra time to study for the N.E.W.T.s," Luna said. "I'm taking mine this year."

Albus spoke up at this point. "I am not surprised to hear either announcement from you, dear ladies. I understand your reasoning for not taking classes, and I will explain the reason for your absence to each of the teachers. Do not be surprised if what was studied 'accidentally' makes it into your grasp during those two weeks. As for Harry's return to the castle, I will fight whom I need to in order to make it happen. If necessary, I will remind people of your marital status and the fact that an attempt was made on all you ladies' lives on the last day of this past term."

"Don't worry about that, sir. The enforced vacation that the Governors gave me allowed me to do a little checking on finances and other bits of information related to me. I discovered that you were far more correct than you thought when you said that only a true Gryffindor could have pulled that sword from the Sorting Hat. It doesn't give me any unusual powers, except maybe to get things from the school a little easier than the average person, like an escape route if I'm out too late, not that I ever would be," he added with a cheeky grin. "I learned that I'm the descendant of both Godric Gryffindor and Helga Hufflepuff. The most important thing that it allows me is the right to override the Board of Governors if I want to."

"Having discovered that, I decided that I am not going to stop taking classes. I am returning to Hogwarts with the rest of the students. The Governors will not like it if they force my hand."

"The mere fact of you returning to classes before their punishment is officially over will force them to respond, as much as they would wish to ignore it," Albus said. "You will be flouting their decision, and I guarantee that they will not appreciate that."

"I have fifty percent of the votes necessary to make final decisions about the disposition of the Governors, and one of the remaining voters has no real chance of making his voice heard. —Riddle is the last of the Gaunt family, who is also last of the Slytherin line. So basically it all comes down to the fact that I can outvote the other Heir if they arise to cause trouble." He grinned and turned to Susan. "But you wouldn't do that to me, would you, Susan?"

"Huh?" she asked, alarmed.

"I traced the family lines of each of my delightful wives and discovered that you happen to be the final Ravenclaw heir."

"Surely you jest!" Susan said breathlessly.

"Nope. Traces through your mother's side, which is why Amelia doesn't qualify as an Heir. Any children of ours will be Heirs to three of the Founders of Hogwarts. Again, it doesn't do anything for them, really."

"So you're declaring war on the Board of Governors?" Susan asked.

"Not exactly. More like I'm hoping to give them incentive to do things my way. The only real war I'm waging is against that freak who's been trying to kill me the past few years."

"No war against the Weasleys?" Pansy asked, enough sugar in her voice to let them know what she was really thinking.

"No," he replied firmly. "I have the feeling that discovering that they followed Bill and Charlie as blindly as Crabbe and Goyle follow Draco has them more than a little disturbed, and that they are torturing themselves more than anything I could do. After all, if they'd been faithful, I wouldn't be a married man right now. I'd be waiting to marry Ginny. Now they know that I'll never trust them the way I once did. Friendship is possible, but never the feeling of family that was once there."

"What has been happening with them, Mada … Amelia?" Hermione asked, blushing at the end as she remembered the request from the Head of
"It's perfectly fine to have friends and family in high places, Hermione," the woman said with a smile. "In answer to your question: since word has gotten out about what actually happened, public opinion about them has plummeted. They're looking at sacking Arthur from his job, and I know that Dumbledore was forced to put up some very strong wards at the Burrow to keep it in one piece. There have been some very nasty Howlers and packages sent their way."

"Answer me honestly, Aunt Amelia," Harry said. "Do they have real cause to fire him, or is this an attempt to curry favour with me?"

She smiled at the ease with which Harry had taken to calling her his aunt. "You know the answer to that. It may be a low paying job, but he does it well, and he's faithful to it."

"Please see to it, if you can, that his superiors are made aware that such an attempt on Arthur Weasley is likely to have exactly the opposite reaction from me. I will not take kindly to vendettas against people from those not involved."

"But …" Pansy said, scowling.

"No buts. If they're firing him for cause, then let them fire him for cause. If they're firing him to make me happy, then I guarantee that it will do just the opposite. I don't particularly like the Weasleys right now, but I will be damned if a man who works hard for his real family to keep them fed and clothed will be fired by the same hypocrites that agreed with him just a month ago. Especially if it's done as a way to assuage their guilt and hide it at the same time."

"Harry, they hurt you!" she shouted. "I saw the pain you were in because of them. They should pay for hurting you!"

"Love, they will. You've already learned what I do with my money when I'm in the mood to spend it. Imagine their reactions when they see the four of you in gowns and robes of highest quality, knowing that I would have likely spread a little of that their way. Remember, I should have been in Slytherin - I can be sneaky enough to get around their stubborn pride. What you want to do would be good for instant gratification - you want to see them publicly humiliated and hurt. I'm not that willing to let it go. I want them to hurt for a long time. They were my family from first year all the way through sixth year. Even when they did things that hurt, like keeping information from me, it was for the best of reasons. At least in their minds. But when Bill and Charlie lied to them, they instantly made a decision as to whether or not I was really family to them." He shrugged, but there were tears threatening to slip free. "I loved them and would have been willing to do anything for them."

"I think the best revenge is that Ginny now knows that she's lost him permanently," Susan said, offering her opinion to the unconvinced Slytherin. "She could have had her heart's desire - marrying The-Boy-Who-Lived. But by not keeping faith in him, she lost everything." Her eyes sparkling with only a little maliciousness. "And I gained everything." She leaned over and kissed Harry on the cheek, pausing long enough for him to be able to get a peek down her skirt.

"Minx," he laughed. "The Weasleys will have their problems. I've washed my hands of them. He thought for a moment. "You know something? I've just had an idea on how to deal with Tom. Right now I'm pretty disgusted with the wizarding world. What if I rant in such a way as to make sure it hits the newspapers, expressing publicly my disgust with the sheeple out there? He's likely to try to talk with me. He might be stupid enough to pull off some of the plans he has, but I'm still alive, despite his best efforts. I'll bet he'll try to convert me. That means we can talk, and I can work on setting up a meeting place. We then mine the hell out of it and set it off when the Death Eaters appear. We could get really lucky and get Tom too, but I'm doubting that."

The pureblood witches and wizards in the room looked confused at the reference so Hermione gave them a short explanation of land mines.

Nodding at the explanation, Amelia looked at him and addressed a concern of hers. "Ranting at the wizarding public like you'd have to could really backfire on you, Harry. You'd quickly go back to everyone hating you, for a real reason this time."

"Honestly? I have been giving some serious thought to disappearing to America for a decade or so after I defeat Riddle. I'm sick of the various factions trying to point me this way or that, using me for their own ends. Even the Headmaster does it occasionally, although he's curtailed that impulse almost completely." He snorted. "More of a knee-jerk thing for him now." Shrugging, he motioned toward the four. "It's their decision, but if they agree, I think I will leave."

Hermione was looking at him with wide eyes, tears in her eyes and oddly, with a smile on her face. "This is the first time I can remember that you've referred to your upcoming battle with Riddle as a foregone conclusion, Harry. At least you winning being a foregone conclusion."

"Hey, I just married four beautiful and sexy women. I intend on living. Besides, I have great-great-grandchildren to watch as they enter Hogwarts for the first time." He grinned at Susan, upping her ante from the previous night. "But hey, that was just a preliminary idea. We need to get the Order together and have a brainstorming session to come up with ideas. I really want to go into this and come out with a minimum of fuss for our side. Then I can get on with the business of spending the rest of my life with my wives."

"Well, I'll get to looking for spells he might not have contemplated once the meeting is done," Hermione said. "I'll need to get together with Professor Snape to get a feel for Riddle's mindset."

Pansy scowled. "I can think of one other to ask, but you might not like the idea. Honestly, I don't want her anywhere near you if at all possible, Harry."

He thought for a moment before responding. "Honestly, I don't see Ginny trying anything to hurt me again, given what was reported to me about the truth-telling session. As for me falling prey to her charms again? I may remember what's under her robes fondly, but this school year has seen too much water pass under the bridge for me to be willing to accept her romantically." He walked over and kissed Pansy gently. "Besides, if I was stupid enough to try for her again, I'd lose the four that make my life worthwhile."
"The first Order meeting of the calendar year 1998 is hereby called to order," Albus said to the people before him that evening. "Our purpose tonight is to act as a sounding board, or as the Muggles seem to call it, a 'think tank.'"

"About what?" a deeply subdued Molly Weasley asked.

Harry walked into the room. "We are here to talk about ideas for how to draw Riddle to his final end, nothing more. I will not listen to anything not related to the subject," he stressed as Bill and Charlie opened their mouths. He walked around and sat down at the head spot of the table as Albus stood and moved down the table slightly. "Sorry for being late, but I was finishing up some paperwork."

His wives walked in the room next, all dressed crisply and very businesslike, and took the chairs on either side of Harry as he glanced quickly around the table, judging the Order members' reactions. The Weasleys weren't the only people startled by his taking the head seat; almost half of the other Order members were surprised as well. Apparently they hadn't realised that his taking control of the prior meeting meant it would become the regular state of affairs. Albus had quietly informed him that the masterful way in which he had taken over the meeting had rather clearly shown that he had it within him to run the organisation. Harry had winced, drawing soft laughter from the Headmaster.

"I've an idea," Harry picked up again, "but it's not a very good one, as far as I'm concerned, and I need more input." He looked over to Severus Snape and then at Ginny. "Our two most valuable resources in this endeavour may well be Professor Snape and Miss Weasley. The first is in fairly constant contact with Riddle, and the other was once his unfortunate slave." Ginny blinked in surprise. "We may have problems that will not be covered in this meeting, since they have no bearing on it, but I'd be a fool not to listen to input from someone who potentially has knowledge of the way the mind of our enemy works." She smiled sadly for only a moment and then sat straighter in her chair, adopting a similar demeanour to his wives.

"I'd really rather that Ginny not be forced to relive that time," Molly said, a little of her usual fire coming through.

"Honestly, madam, I would normally agree with you," Harry said. "Were the possible benefits not so great, I wouldn't even consider dragging her through the cesspit that passes for Riddle's psyche, no matter our personal situation. But if we can come up with a good plan, we should be able to save untold lives. I'm afraid that we must ask a bit of your daughter to get that accomplished."

"What's your plan that you don't like?" Tonks asked.

"Piss off the wizarding world by chewing them out in print over the love they have of scapegoating. I was the bad guy for so long, but now that the truth about a number of things is out, they suddenly love me again. The plan I don't like is taking advantage of their flip-flopping and getting them really angry at me. This might make Tom decide to contact me, but since he hasn't so far this school year ..." He trailed off, letting them make the obvious conclusion.

"This is unacceptable for many reasons," Susan said in a quiet voice, "not the least of which is that it's about time that the public stop dragging Harry through the mud while he fights to save the very people who vilify him." She turned to Hermione. "See, I can use big words too!" she finished with a small laugh.

"Yes, dear," Hermione said in a voice used to tell a child they've a good job, but grinning as she spoke. General chuckling answered her comment, albeit nervously from the Weasley clan, who looked afraid to join the laughter for fear that they had simply done too much to Harry to permit it.

"A far better idea would be to develop a rumour that you have access to a specific item or bit of knowledge that he might desire," Severus drawled quietly. "If we can make it irresistible enough, he would come for it, in a place of our choosing."

"A power ritual," Ginny said into the silence. "The Tom I knew wanted power more than anything else. And if rumour was that this ritual required the sacrifice of others -" She shuddered as she remembered something.

"What is it, honey?" Molly asked.

Ginny sniffed. "Riddle enjoyed the pain of others a little too much, if you understand my meaning." At her mother's puzzled look, she said, almost too quiet to hear. "I had my very first … uh, orgasm … while he was in control of my body. I think I was killing the roosters at the time. It was his mind reacting, but it was my body. I showered for over an hour trying to feel clean again."

"Well, that would be disturbing," Harry said with no trace of humour or derision in his voice.

"It was." She would not look at Harry.

"All right," Harry said, pulling everyone from their own disquieting thoughts. "Try this on for size, and let's pick it apart piece by piece. I have found a book in the Black library while going through it. It contains a ritual for increasing your power level by an order of magnitude." Seeing blank looks, except from Hermione and Luna, he explained, "multiplies it by ten. Problem with it, from my point of view, is that it takes the sacrifice of someone's magic and often their life. I've found that the book is warded six ways from Sunday, and I can't spare the time to destroy it at the moment. Since I don't want so evil a book anywhere near where I'm living, I'm going to hide it in Godric's Hollow, since no one would look for it in a burnt out old building. I'm going to place a Fidelius Charm over the site as well the day I drop it there, so no one will remember it after I do it."

"Why Godric's Hollow?" Albus asked.

"Two reasons. First, the site is nothing but a burnt out building and a few small outbuildings so blowing the hell out of it isn't going to do any more damage to the place, really, since I'd need to tear it down completely to rebuild out there. The cemetery on the plot, where my parents are buried, is far enough away to make it unlikely to be damaged. The second reason is simply poetic justice. The place where he met his first end becomes the place where he meets his final end."
"How delightfully Slytherin of you," Severus said with a slight smile. "One wonders if he will appreciate it in his final moments."

Harry looked at his Potions teacher and smiled. "Thank you, Professor. That is probably the nicest thing that someone I'm not married to has ever said to me."

"What do you mean?" Bill asked, white-faced.

Harry was quite certain what Bill was truly asking about, considering the fact that his face had lost all colour, but Harry intentionally answered the question he seemed to be asking. "Well, as far as Hogwarts is concerned, the disagreement between Professor Snape and myself is somewhat legendary. For him to tell me that he expects me to win is quite the compliment." He looked at Severus's face and let him see the twinkle. Harry was answered with a very slight smirk of amused approval.

"What do you mean by married?" Ron asked, the slightly green colouring his face clashing horribly with both his hair and his Chudley Cannons orange shirt.

"You know, Ronald," Harry said calmly. "You stand before a legal representative and swear to cherish, honour, and generally love someone for the remainder of your days on the planet. Marriage."

"You got married?" Bill finally asked.

"That's not really the scope of this meeting. Let's move on." He rather forcefully brought the conversation back to the reason the meeting had been called. "Can anyone see holes in this scenario? I think that Tom will accept that I might not want such a dark book in the house I'm living in, so he'd likely believe that I'd be moving it elsewhere. With Professor Snape being so good at what he does, he can give Tom minimal warning and make it seem believable. I've been brewing up the explosives with which to destroy the area, so I'll start mining the place soon."

He looked around to see two significant emotions. The Weasleys were all wearing expressions of sorrow mixed with horror, save Ginny, who sat with no visible expression. The others in the meeting tended toward some malicious amusement at the Weasley plight, having endured more diatribes against him than they could conceivably wanted to hear.

"I think you broke the Weasleys, Harry," Tonks said, eyeing the interesting shade that Charlie was currently sporting.

He shrugged. "That's neither here nor there, to be honest. We have a question before us on the table. We need suggestions on how to improve it. We need to make sure that Riddle will fall for it and come to the right place." He frowned. "For one thing, we need to ensure that he will come, rather than only send his goons. I understand that we'll have goons there, but I need Riddle there too."

"I believe that I can be certain to get him there, if you will trust me to embellish slightly on your story. In fact, if phrased properly, we could potentially get only Riddle there."

"No, Severus," Albus said before turning to Harry. "I believe that I have a possible story that will make Tom much more likely to come to Godric's Hollow. It requires that I take on the role of master manipulator in regards to you again, however." Harry cocked his head and motioned for the Headmaster to continue. "Rather than you moving the book to get it out of your household, you know nothing of the book. You have allowed myself and a few trusted individuals to gain access to the Black library in an attempt to find spells or rituals to help you against Tom. I found the spell in question in this book, and will be moving it to keep it out of your hands, lest you become the next Dark Lord." His smile told Harry how likely he thought that possibility to actually be.

"... and you talked to Professor Snape, to explain things, since you'd never suspect him of really being in league with Riddle," Harry laughed. "Perfect! I think that this proves the need for this brainstorming session, sir. Ginny Weasley came up with an idea, Professor Snape clarified it, and you finalised it. This should work, right, Professor Snape?"

Snape pursed his lips in thought for a moment. "If we use Albus as the mover and shaker in the attempt to move the alleged book, it will most certainly work. Riddle cannot conceive of someone not wanting to have that much power, save Albus, so he will jump at the chance."

Harry nodded. "Before we table this for the night, does anyone else have any ideas that might work? I hate the idea of putting all our eggs in one basket on this, because this is a 'do or die' scenario. If this attempt to trick him doesn't work, we're likely in for a long haul, with a long and bloody war of attrition." Looks around the table showed no one with any ideas. "So, we're on for this plan, and hopefully some time in the next few months we can all celebrate the destruction of a Dark Lord." After a pause, he added, "If you come up with another idea, do not hesitate to contact either Albus or myself concerning it, and we'll set up a meeting."

There was the general milling around that usually happened at these meetings, and Harry noticed the Weasleys congregating together, looking bothered by something. It was likely the fiery, young, female redhead facing them, whose stance made it quite obvious that she was angry at them. He tried to look unobtrusive and positioned himself to listen to her.

"... at all!" she was hissing. "We betrayed him, Mother, and you all sit there and think that apologising to him is going to make up for telling him that he's not really family, no matter what we kept telling him. You took his hand off the clock! You believed the world's largest arsehole, also known as our brother Percy!" She stopped and took a deep breath. "Mother, I am stating this now. I am quite well aware of what I have lost, and I am getting the impression that you haven't. If I'd trusted Harry the way that I should have, I'd be wearing his engagement ring right now, rather than dealing with the fact that he's apparently married to one of those four girls. I must live with you for the next year and a half, but when that time is over, I will be leaving the house for good and not looking back. We treated him worse than we would have treated one of Tom's Death Eaters."

"Munchkin ..." Bill started.
Harry sat back in his seat on the train as it pulled out of Kings Cross Station. Neville sat with him to keep the seats for Harry's wives, although Neville was as yet unaware of that change in status. "The Board of Governors is going to explode over this, Harry. Your suspension is still another two weeks long," Neville grinnned as he said it, showing his actual opinion of Harry's actions.

"I'm hoping that they'll raise high holy hell over it. Might make it that much easier to do to them what I'm planning," Neville looked at him inquiringly. "Oh no. I'm going to surprise everyone. Besides, your grandmother is on the Board of Governors, and if there's any hint that you knew what was coming, she'd likely become quite put out with you."

"She couldn't possibly be angrier with me than I am with her right now. Susan's aunt was the only one who stood up for you, and she was censured! Gran was rather surprised when I refused to back down from chewing her out."

"She still hasn't lost the image of the Neville from our first year, has she?" Harry asked.

"She has now," Neville laughed.

The door opened to allow entry for Hermione, Pansy, Susan and Luna, each of whom gently kissed Harry on the lips, and Neville on the cheek. "Careful," said a blushing Neville, "Harry might get jealous."

They conferred with their eyes quite quickly before Luna said, "Why would our husband get jealous at our greeting a mutual friend?" Her eyes were sparkling with mirth.

"Still, I think that … wait, did you say …" To say that Neville was stunned would be an understatement.

Harry quickly sealed and Silenced the door and all four walls. "We're not hiding it, Neville, but neither are we shouting it from the rooftops just yet, no matter how much I want to. The quarters that the five of us share are now a honeymoon suite for us. I am, in fact, lucky enough to be married to four women who could do so much better than me."

"Bullshit!" Harry was surprised that this came not from any of his wives, but from Neville. "I wish that I were half the man that you are. You have managed to catch the interest of the four sexiest women at Hogwarts, damn you!" he finished with an embarrassed laugh, blushing furiously.

"You've not looked at Hannah in the last year, have you?" Susan asked. "She wears the robes she does for the express purpose of not being inundated with drool from boys and some girls coming after her." She blushed. "I may well be the only person at Hogwarts who knows what she looks like nude."

Harry looked at her for a moment. "Something tells me I'd end up with blood flow problems if I asked how you know what she looks like in the nude."

"You're right," Susan said softly, her eyes sparkling wickedly. "I think I was half the man that you are. You have managed to catch the interest of the four sexiest women at Hogwarts, damn you!"

"You're not looking for a quick shag, Susan," he replied with an embarrassed smile. "I want … I want a girlfriend, a partner. Maybe even a future wife."

Susan looked at him for a long moment before saying, "Tell her I said that someday she'll be showing off her tattoo. She may blush furiously, but that will get you a conversation with her that … she trusts my judgement. No reason you can't start off on a good foot with her."

"I can tell when I'm being chased out," he laughed. "Just don't knock the train off the tracks in the heat of passion." His grin told them that there was no anger causing his choice to leave. After the door was unlocked, he left, humming quietly.

Harry looked at the women who gave his life meaning and said to Hermione, "You don't usually put your robes on this early in the trip. At least you don't in September. Why this early now?"

She gave him a half-lidded look that made his pulse quicken and began a familiar blood migration. She quickly blacked out the windows and locked the door before opening her robes. "I don't think you really grasped what I meant when I told you over the break that I'm an exhibitionist. You may not have noticed it over the past few years, but I was always in blouses that showed what color my bra was, or accidentally moving so that Ron or someone might get a flash of my knickers or cleavage."

"I think I'm glad I didn't notice earlier," Harry breathed as he stared at the almost nude woman before him -- only the robe and shoes kept her from being classified as nude. "If you'd done that to me first year -- made me notice, that is -- I'd likely have entered puberty right then." He shook his head, smiling at the thought.
She gasped, and suspicious wetness appeared in her eyes. "Lorelei," she finally managed to say through the happy tears that had begun to fall.

"What was your mother's name?" he asked.

"You'll be. You'll be growing up in a Voldemort-free world, too." He looked up into Luna's eyes, which were wider than normal. She was obviously shocked at just how accepting of the concept he was. "What was your mother's name?"

"You're just a collection of cells right now, but in nine months you'll be out here meeting your..." he stopped short. "Would it bother you to be six months pregnant while sitting your N.E.W.T.s?"

"If it did, I wouldn't have stopped my birth control," she replied simply.

He looked at her for a long moment, grinding against her a little and getting an equal and opposite reaction from her. "I think I've got too much clothing in the way," he said, and suddenly everything he wore was folded neatly on one of the compartment seats. His erection stood tall between them and she bit her lower lip. "Tell me, love," he said with the growl returning to his voice, "does it turn you on to know that others will be watching?"

He lifted her gently into the air and moved to press her against the wall of the cabin before sliding inside her. He'd been sure that she was more than ready for him, and he was proven correct. "Does it make your heart pound harder to know that your co-wives are watching me fuck you senseless, wishing that they were you?" She gasped at his profanity and squeezed him as he slid deeper in. "Would you like the window blacking dropped, so that everyone on this train can watch me make that baby you want?" She moaned deep within her body at that thought, and he felt her pulse against him several times in rapid succession. "Oh, feels like you might have had a small orgasm there," he moaned at her as he began to thrust deeper and deeper into her. Their lovemaking picked up speed until he was slapping against her with every thrust, and she was moaning louder and louder with every one. One of the other girls moved to Silence the compartment, but Harry growled, "No, I want the whole train to know that I made love to this beautiful woman. I want guys to look at her and wish that they'd been lucky enough to catch her eye. I want everyone to know what she does to me."

This was too much for Hermione, who let loose with the keening wail she always did during a particularly powerful orgasm. She thrust against him, moaning with each thrust. He felt his own orgasm building and soon he was exploding into her, leaning hard against her, panting in her ear.

As he came down from his own high, he began to chuckle. She looked up at him, slightly unfocused and cocked her head in curiosity. "I was just thinking that a small part of me doesn't want you to get pregnant from this time. Imagine us making love in the Hogwarts library." He was suddenly aware just how much that turned her on as she gasped and pulsed against his softening organ a few times. "Now I know that we have to do that before the school year is done." He chuckled again. "Maybe name the resulting child Alexandria, if it's a daughter?"

"Gods, yes!" she panted, squeezing him tightly one last time before letting him pull out. A couple quick spells later and they were both cleaned up and dressed, more or less. They unblocked the windows and found a small crowd of people outside, several of the girls voicelessly telling them that they were quite well aware of what had been going on in the cabin.

"So, honey, what do you think?" he asked Hermione. "Everyone in that hallway knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that you were having sex in here."

"Knowing that makes me even hornier than I was before," she groaned. "I can't wait until we're back at Hogwarts, because I am going to our room, stripping down, and starting an orgy with the rest of you."

Luna was looking a little bemused and was uncharacteristically silent. "What's wrong, love?" Harry asked. "Did what just happened bother..."

She lit up. "Oh, heavens no!" she exclaimed. "If you recover enough before we reached Hogwarts, I'd certainly like to be where Hermione was. I'm not naked under my robes, though."

"Easily enough remedied," Pansy purred at her.

Luna smiled as her nipples became more prominent under her clothes. "Very true," she answered with her eyes twinkling. They heard a thud in the hall and looked to see a fourth year getting up from the floor, eyes wide as he stared into the cabin. It was obvious that staring at Luna's breasts, rather than watching his path, had led to his accident.

As the boy sped away, Harry darkened the windows again. "What's wrong, Luna? You didn't answer the real question."

"There are two main ones," Susan said. "Do you want to know the sex of the baby if you are pregnant?"

"Yes, please," Luna said softly. A few moments later, she was surrounded by a soft pink glow. "A girl," she whispered. "I'm carrying your... eep!" she finished as Harry leapt across the cabin and swooped her into his arms.

"My daughter!" he said with wonder in his voice, only just above a whisper. "You're carrying my daughter inside you!" He set her down gently and knelt before her, gently kissing her stomach. "Hello in there, little one," he whispered, although everyone in the compartment could hear him. "I know you're just a collection of cells right now, but in nine months you'll be out here meeting your mommies and showing the world how beautiful I know you'll be. You'll be growing up in a Voldemort-free world, too." He looked up into Luna's eyes, which were wider than normal. She was obviously shocked at just how accepting of the concept he was. "What was your mother's name?"

She gasped, and suspicious wetness appeared in her eyes. "Lorelei," she finally managed to say through the happy tears that had begun to fall.
Harry responded by reaching up under her skirt and discovering, to his delight, that she had chosen to ‘forget’ her knickers that morning. He gently spread her thighs apart and began to tease her with his tongue.

"I need … need to get … comfortable," she panted, and then placed her legs over his shoulders, carefully locking her ankles together afterward. He continued with abandon, bringing squeal after squeal from her husband before he finally stopped. She released him, and he moved forward, still on his knees, and slipped into her tight opening, one of the other ladies having been so kind as to release his necessary parts from durance vile. Their lovemaking at this point was fast and frenzied, with both having been worked up by Harry's tender ministrations, and he was quickly joining her as she came.

When they had recovered, he held Luna tightly. "I love you, Luna, and I love that you're carrying my … our baby." After a pause, he said, "I know that I asked her name, but would it bother either you or your father if we named the child after your mum?"

"You never met her, and yet you wish to honour her," Luna sniffed. "Why?"

"She was your mother. She had a part in making a very beautiful and special woman. If the universe were fair, she'd have been standing next to my parents when we married."

"She was," Luna said quite seriously. "Sirius Black was there as well. They were simply on a different plane of existence. Heaven, if you will."

"Does that mean that they've been watching us when we …" Susan asked, suddenly blushing.

"I don't know, but I'm not in a hurry to find out," Harry said with a laugh. "I intend to have a very long life with you beautiful women ahead of me."

Hermione sniffed. "I don't think I'll ever be able to say just how happy that makes me feel to hear you talk about living past the demise of Voldemort."

"I have a reason … a desire to survive the meeting now. Even if Luna wasn't pregnant, I'd want to live. You four make my life worth living. I don't think I'll ever be able to stress that enough to you. When I thought you'd all been killed, I was willing to meet Voldemort face-to-face and suicide bomb him. I had nothing to live for." He finished, stressing his words as hard as he could.

"Well, we will be helping you at the end then," Pansy said. "You helped take me from that snarky little bitch that I was in the first five and a half years and make me into a girl worth knowing." She giggled for a moment. "Amusingly enough, I'm the one of your wives with the most ordinary of the sexual preferences. We've got a wife who likes to be spanked, one who is likely to have sex with you in the Great Hall someday soon, and someone who likes to be tied up. Then you have me, who prefers to be cuddled and caressed and simply made love to." She paused to look at Luna and Susan, who were kissing gently. "Well, I do like to watch," she finished with a blush.

"Then maybe we should sit down next to them," he said, reaching behind her and gently fondling her. "I've made two of my wives happy on this trip, and I'd like to see if I can manage four for four. Luna's helping out the sexy redhead, so I thought that perhaps I could make love to my raven-haired goddess."

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She bit her lip while her blouse made her opinion about that idea rather evident, even through her bra. "I think, my husband, that I would quite enjoy that." She let him gently undo her blouse, and sighed happily as his tongue began to tease the now exposed nipples. It wasn't long before they were bouncing merrily on the seat and she was squealing out her release. He

He was making love to Susan, completing his desire to make love to all four, when he heard Hermione say, "We're coming into Hogsmeade station."

"So'm I!" he grunted as he spent into Susan.

"Oh yes," Susan panted. "Wonderful timing." They took a moment to straighten up, Susan rather futilely brushing her hands across her very prominent nipples as if that would make them soften under her shirt, instead of causing the pleasurable shudder that it did. "I think we'd best cast a few spells to clean up in here. Everyone knows what happened, but I think clearing out the scent would be a good idea."

Harry closed his eyes for a moment, and a ethereal breeze rose and swept through the compartment, clearing out the pheromones.

"Thank you," Hermione whispered. "It was getting a little overwhelming for me." She blushed. "I was about to jump you again, and now isn't the time."

"Could be interesting, though," he replied with a grin, and was rewarded with a very light slap on the arm from the laughing brunette who wore his ring. "Come on, let's head on up to the school." He tossed a Warming Charm on Hermione, since she was nude under her robes, and then led the four from the compartment and to a waiting carriage. Luna, the smallest of them, sat on his lap and cuddled happily against his chest until they reached the school.

The silence as he entered the Great Hall ahead of them was deafening, if such a thing can be said. Finally, someone at the Ravenclaw table spoke up. "Didn't the Board of Governors deny you the right to be here for another two weeks?" The voice clearly held no malice, only puzzlement.

"They have no real enforcement arm," Harry said. "Besides, think about it - they're telling a student who wants to learn that he can't because they chose to listen to the Daily Prophet. If they want me out of school for the two weeks, let them come and remove me themselves. Until they do, I'm coming to classes and learning as I choose to."
A few moments later, the murmur returned, louder than before, as Neville and Hannah came into the Hall, and for once the girl had her robes open. The general consensus at what they were seeing seemed to be best phrased as, "Holy crap! She had that under her robes?" The two came up to the Potter table, and two new seats appeared.

"Thank you, Susan," the blonde Hufflepuff said as Neville pulled her chair out for her to sit down. "And thank you, Neville, for being a gentleman." She was blushing demurely.

"I doubt you could do better than Neville, Miss Abbot," Harry said with a smile. "I trust him alone with my wives when they're being comfortable in the suite we share."

"Given the way Susan likes to be comfortable," Hannah said with an impish grin, "I believe that means quite a … wait, did you say …" She paused and lowered her voice to a whisper. "Did you say 'wives'?"

"It's okay to say it conversationally," Susan said. "And since you don't squee, there's no worries there." Her eyes went mischievous as she added, "Well, perhaps Neville will someday discover the only time you do squee."

Neville blushed furiously but said, "Only if she deems me worthy of such a great gift." Hannah simply blushed.

Most of Hufflepuff found a reason to stop by for a moment, if only to welcome Harry and the others back. The students at the Ravenclaw and Gryffindor tables seemed more than a little embarrassed and worried, and could only steal glances at the private table. The Slytherins, as they were minus a ferret and his goons, treated Harry as they always did; they ignored him.

All in all, Harry found it a delightful meal, with excellent company and, as he told the others, "The floor show has been amazing."

He hadn't been back at school a week when he was called to the Headmaster's office. "Harry, it appears that the Board of Governors was rather put out with your decision to return to school," Dumbledore said to him.

"So, is the meeting today, or on the weekend?" Harry asked with a grin.

"They have chosen to hold the meeting on Saturday, during the Hogsmeade weekend."

Harry snorted. "Ah, another attempt to bother me. No matter. If they don't see the wisdom of my choice, they'll find themselves just a little … well, do you think nonplussed would be a good description?"

"Bewilderment will be the least of their emotions," Dumbledore replied with a laugh. "Just remember that you and Susan will need to be at the private parlour of the Three Broomsticks at 1 p.m."

"Oh yes," Harry laughed. "They are definitely attempting to flex their non-existent muscle with me. There is no way that they can't realise that they are dealing with the heaviest time in the town. They probably will ensure that the students are 'accidentally' made aware of the meeting, so as to watch me show up, expecting me to be cowed." His grin was almost malicious. "And Aunt Amelia is not likely to warn them otherwise."

"I suppose with her busy day job, as it were, such a trivial piece of information would simply slip her mind," was the Headmaster's simple response. His voice and eyes betrayed the humour he felt about the impending situation.

Saturday came quickly. Harry's wives chose to accompany him, with both Susan and himself in their very finest robes. They walked proudly down into the town, developing a small following as they walked. Their entourage remained in the main room of the Three Broomsticks when the five students entered the pub's meeting room at roughly noon, even ahead of the Board. Harry and the girls sat and talked until the Governors began to arrive. "What are they doing here, Potter?" drawled Lucius Malfoy.

"Good afternoon to you as well, Mr Malfoy." He turned to Pansy and said, "Good manners are so hard to find in people of low breeding these days, wouldn't you say?" The sharp hiss of Lucius's nasal inhalation led Harry to say, without looking at the blond man, "I'd put the wand away if I were you, Lucius. You wouldn't like where I'll put it if you don't."

"Not a smart thing, threatening a Board member," replied Lucius with a wicked smile. "It could even lead to your expulsion from the school."

"Oh, I wasn't threatening a Board member, Lucius. I was promising retribution to an individual who was about to threaten me. The fact that said individual happens to be a member of the Board of Governors is secondary and not at all germane to the situation."

"They do not belong in here," another voice stated as a tall woman walked into the room. She had so sharp a chin that Harry found himself thinking that she probably tended to wear something to blunt it, in order to avoid puncturing herself. "Ladies, leave."

Harry looked at the woman and said, "The meeting has not yet started. It is still fifteen minutes until 1 p.m., therefore it's perfectly acceptable for them to remain here so that we may continue to converse." With that, he turned and ignored the remaining members as they walked in, even Neville's grandmother. He did not react again until Amelia Bones entered the room. "Ah, Aunt Amelia!" he said warmly, standing and enveloping her in a hug. "Well, it appears that everyone is here, so the meeting should start."

"You are an arrogant child," a rather portly man said. "We are here to discuss your punishment for disobeying the ruling of the Board, and you think to order us around as to when the meeting shall start?"
"We are here to talk about that punishment and what shall be done concerning it, yes," Harry replied. "However, I find it interesting that every single one of you, save one, has either ignored me or been openly hostile to me since arriving. Madam Granford proceeded to order these four out of the room the moment that she arrived, and by no means was it polite. I expect the Death Eater over there to be hostile to me, since I'm someday going to stamp 'Paid' to his half-blooded master."

"Lucius Malfoy was under the Imperius!" the portly man bellowed.

"Makes sense. That excuse worked last time, and if it keeps him from becoming Dementor food, I'd imagine the fact that he is so susceptible and weak-willed becoming public knowledge was worth it. Or will we discover that a large sum of money ended up in someone's hands just before he was declared innocent?" He turned to face Lucius. "I remember you standing in the Ministry in your Death Eater gear, Lucy. I've seen people under Imperius, and I'm able to shake it off, even from your half-blood master. You may have fooled these people, but you won't fool me.

"But think about what that says about the Board of Governors. You have as a member someone who has been publicly shown to be weak-minded, since he can so easily be turned to the Dark side. You ally yourselves with him. This does not speak well for the Board of Governors."

"How dare you?" Madam Longbottom exclaimed, rising to her feet. "You dare equate my family with Death Eaters and weak-minded fools? You know nothing of what you speak, child!"

"I know far more than you, Madam," he replied coldly, "and you will find me even more difficult to cow than your grandson is right now. Considering the outcome of the last shouting match that you two had, that should tell you something. Yes, I call you weak-willed and ally, however unwitting, to Voldemort. You trust the Daily Prophet to give you fair and even reporting, despite their long history otherwise. You vote with Lucius Malfoy, a known Death Eater. His bastard son and concubine were directly involved in a plot to murder these four ladies. You choose to continue my suspension, despite discovering that you had been wrong to suspend me in the first place. You want to kick me out of Hogwarts permanently because I'm daring to show that you people are nothing. You censured the one voice amongst you who held to what was proven to be the truth, rather than re-examine the evidence. To paraphrase a very wise man, 'You can choose what is right, or what is easy.' You people chose easy."

Twelve of the thirteen Board members were flabbergasted at Harry's audacity, while the last one was trying very hard not to laugh. Based on their facial expressions, the four Mrs. Potters were having similar troubles. Harry paced around the room for a moment before saying, "I don't like doing this, but you leave me no choice. You simply can not be trusted with power any more. I don't want to do this, but I need to."

"What do you think you can do?" sneered the sharp-chinned woman. "Rant us into submission?"

"Actually, no. I am the last remaining Heir of two of the Founders, Gryffindor and Hufflepuff. Susan Bones is the final Heir of Ravenclaw. Between the two of us, who are a legal fiction of three people, we have the power to overrule the fourth and final Heir, Tom Marvolo Riddle, also known as Voldemort, even if he had bothered to show up today." Ignoring the shock and outrage gathering on various faces, Harry stood straighter and spoke formally. "The Houses of Gryffindor and Hufflepuff vote to disband the Board of Governors for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

"With a seventy five percent vote from the Founders' Heirs, which trumps any vote that the Board might wish to make, the Board of Governors for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is hereby declared disbanded," Harry said to them. "Since you no longer have a job, you are no longer needed here, so I suggest that you leave." He grinned and looked over toward the one former Board member who didn't look like they'd just been slapped with a freshly caught trout. "Except you, Aunt Amelia."
Like A Phoenix From The Ashes
Chapter 15

The group exited the meeting room and found Neville looking at his grandmother with ill-disguised anger. Finally, he exploded. "Well, Gran, if you hadn't insisted on believing the Prophet and helping those with an agenda against Harry, maybe the Board of Governors would still exist!" She opened her mouth, but he continued unchecked. "You've made me sit through your rants before, so now you'll sit through mine. I support Harry in his decision. The only one on the Board with the backbone to stand up to popular opinion was Susan's aunt. You helped the Malfoys hurt him, and from where I stand, you might as well have that tattoo on your arm!"

"I would be careful talking about your betters that way, child," Lucius Malfoy drawled as he walked closer to the 'conversation'.

"Why should it stop me? You talk down to everyone else in the world, and even a mosquito is your better." There was a sharp inhalation from everyone in the room. "Your son is hardly any better than you with his constantly reminding anyone in earshot that his daddy or the Dark Lord would deal with people who were against him. He seems to think that you and Voldemort are rather interchangeable."

Malfoy whipped the wand out of his cane but found that Neville's wand was already aimed at his chest. "If I even think that you're about to cast a spell, Death Eater, I'll blow a hole through you so big that Hagrid could climb through without getting messy. Now put your little wand away and leave this establishment before I am forced to do something that I probably wouldn't regret."

Malfoy turned to face Neville's grandmother, obviously dismissing the younger Longbottom. "How the mighty have fallen, Madam," he said in a pitying tone obviously meant to insult. He still had the wand drawn but lowered.

"The Longbottoms have been on the Registry for hundreds of years, Lucius," Neville drawled in a passable imitation of the blond man's preferred method of speaking. "At least we had a height to fall from. The Malfoys have never risen above the muck."

Anything further that Malfoy might have said was stopped when Harry and his wives burst into applause. "Nicely said, Neville!" Hermione exclaimed. The older man spun, wand rising, and his mouth opened as if to say a spell, a snarl on his face. That was as far as he got, because Harry thrust his hands out hard, looking for all the world as if he was pushing Malfoy away from everyone. The result was that Malfoy was blown straight through the wall of the Three Broomsticks.

"Nobody threatens the women I love," Harry growled as some of the pub's patrons ran to the brand new 'window' to look outside. Malfoy was lying spreadeagled in the street. An elderly witch in a yellow cloak looked down at the unconscious man and said, "That had to hurt," before continuing down the street. One of the local dogs, a mutt that looked to be mostly beagle, apparently decided after a few moments of thought that the Malfoy patriarch was furniture and cocked its leg, loosing a stream at him. This was what was needed to wake him.

"Get away from me, cur!" yelled Malfoy, moving to strike the dog. However, it was then that he discovered that his passage through the wall had broken some things, such as his arm and one of his legs. His yell of pain did nothing to improve his public image, since it involved a few words that usually were not said within the hearing of impressionable children. This caused a pretty young woman with just such an impressionable five year old daughter to cast a spell on him, and soap bubbles began to flow from his mouth when he opened it.

"Obviously your parents never taught you properly," she huffed as she walked off.

Aurors stepped out of their hiding places at that point and approached Malfoy. "I guess it's time we get you to St. Mungo's," one of them said as she pulled her hood back. Shocking pink hair told Harry who it was immediately.

"I want Potter arrested for attacking me!" Malfoy gargled.

"We can file a report, but since I saw the incident in question, 'Uncle', I'd recommend that you not push that idea too far, lest you end up with problems from filing a false report with the Aurors."

"I can guarantee such a result," Amelia said. "I was also a witness to the altercation. It was fairly obvious that you were about to cast a spell at Hermione Granger, so Mr. Potter's actions were entirely legal."

Malfoy's snarl worsened and he growled, "You will pay for this, Potter." Anything more that he might have threatened was lost in his transport to St. Mungo's.

"Why is it that no one ever tells me, 'You will rue the day'?" Harry asked. "I long for the time when one of my opponents threatens with day rue-ing." This caused more than a little laughter through the establishment while Harry walked over to Madam Rosmerta.

"I'd like to apologise for the damage, ma'am, and will pay for the repairs to your wall," he said to her when she looked up at him.

"Nonsense!" she replied. "You were protecting your friend, and if I don't miss my guess, lady love. No harm to me, no foul, no payment necessary."

He smiled at her. "I fear that we are at an impasse then, dear lady, because I feel that it is my duty to pay for the damage to your wall."

"I rather fancy a window there, to be honest, and you saved me the trouble of having the minor demolitions work done to open a hole in the wall." He mock-glared at her before he turned to look at the hole. After a moment of concentration, a window appeared to replace the hole, complete with glass and trim. "There you go, Madam Rosmerta. One new window, just for you." He grinned impudently at her, making her laugh. He then turned to...
When the group was outside, Harry turned to Neville, who had left the Three Broomsticks with Harry and his wives, completely ignoring his grandmother. "I want to apologise for doing something that led to you being screamed at by your Gran," he said.

"I know you," came Neville's response, "and if you and Susan abolished the Board of Governors, then you had a reason. She needs to get off her lazy arse and realise that sitting around and saying that you're fighting the Dark doesn't mean that you actually are fighting it. If anything, by doing nothing, you support the Dark by expecting everyone else to do your fighting." He grinned. "I think it really bothers her that I'm officially an adult now, so she can't exactly bounce me from the family rolls, or any of the other things she'd likely do to get me back in line. It also bothers her that I've developed too much of a spine for her liking."

"I just hope that you two can get things worked out," Harry said. "She's all the family that you have, and I know that I'd give just about anything to have relatives that actually cared about whether I live or die."

"That's what you have us for," Pansy said quite seriously. "Oh by the way, as a complete aside having nothing to do with the conversation at hand, did I tell you that my parents purchased a Muggle company that makes drills? I think they're called Grunnings. They fired everyone not up to their standards. Quite a few people went in the purge." She was grinning widely at him when she was finished.

Harry laughed. "Not related my arse," he said with a chuckle. "Revenge, while not necessarily sweet, is certainly fun at times. I would imagine it safe to assume that one Vernon Dursley was less than exemplary in their eyes."

"Why, I believe that you just might be right!" she said sweetly. He hugged her, and the group headed off to enjoy themselves.

Another week went by, with the Potters and the Headmaster meeting occasionally to hash out how to deal with the loss of the Board of Governors. Harry's choice was to leave the running of the school in Dumbledore's hands for a while as they worked to rebuild the Board.

"We can never completely avoid the possibility of power-mad people taking over," Harry said, "but I'd like to make it as difficult as possible. Maybe a binding oath to work for the good of the school and its students and not only for your own good? That allows dissent - I don't want my ideas to be declared the only way that's good for Hogwarts - but they honestly have to believe that what they're doing is best for the school. While Malfoy might well have felt that getting rid of all but the pure-bloods is best for the wizarding world and Hogwarts, the rest of his decisions were always with his political self-interest in mind. He wasn't thinking of the school first. That's what I'd want the oath to assure."

"I'm sure that we can work something out," Dumbledore said. "Are you going to get Madam Bones involved with the new Board of Governors?"

"If she'll agree, yes," Harry replied. "Gives a sense of continuity as well." He paused. "You know, I think we need some parents of Muggle-borns on the Board. They have as much of a stake in how things are run here as anyone else, right?" He smiled wryly. "Wouldn't that cause a stink, allowing Muggles to have a say in how their magical children are taught?"

He was answered with a big kiss from Hermione. "I'll bet my parents would agree to serve if you asked, and if the oath were phrased properly, I'm sure that they'd agree to it in a heartbeat."

"We need to be careful about loading too many people that I know onto the Board, though," he replied.

"I'm not worried about that right now," she replied. "With the Headmaster in control, and the official requirement that all major changes have to be approved by a majority of the heirs of the Founders, we should be good for a time. We can take our time figuring out how the new Board should be designed."

"Hermione is right," Pansy said. "With the Headmaster in charge, we can do something like ask Amelia to set up a small group to figure out how best to run the school. I'd definitely recommend that the Grangers be part of that group at the very least."

"Not to sidetrack the Board of Governors conversation, but there is a bigger issue I think we need to worry about. We need to think about when and how we're going to kill off Riddle," Susan said. "There are two of us who are going to be giving birth in the last third of the year, and you've already said that our children will be born into a Voldemort-free world."

"I prefer to wait and conceive mine in a Riddle-free world, knowing quite well that my husband will still be around to do that," Pansy said with a smile.

"We still have to conceive little Hypatia," Hermione said with a deep chuckle. At Harry's confused look, she said, "Famous mathematician, philosopher and teacher at Alexandria. She's sort of the unofficial patron saint of Librarians everywhere."

Susan gave Hermione a wicked grin. "So if your first six children are boys, you'll keep going until you have a girl just so you can name her 'Hypatia'?")

Harry chuckled. "We'll deal with that shortly, Hermione," he said. "In the meantime, let's get down to dinner. I'm hungry, and I really don't think we can get any further on the Board conversation right now. It's got to be left in the hands of those reforming the Board. Susan and I will have some say in the matter, but I really think that the best we can do is give the student body's take on the Board."

"Agreed," the Headmaster said. "Shall we?" The six of them headed to the Great Hall for their meal.
"Harry," Luna said before they entered the castle, "I think something is going to happen tonight at dinner. I'm not sure what, but just be prepared." He nodded.

He found out quickly when he sat down in his usual place, after Dumbledore had taken his own seat. Ginny Weasley approached the Head table and handed her wand to the Headmaster, drawing an intrigued look from the man. She then turned and faced the small table with no little trepidation on her face. "I've come to apologise for my stupidity," she said clearly. "I do not ask forgiveness, because I don't deserve it, but I do take responsibility for what I did to you." She turned to the others. "That also goes for you four. I have been a horrible bitch to everyone connected to Har… Mr. Potter since August, and my attitude lost me a sister to go with the future husband that I threw away. I apologise to you four as well." She retrieved her wand and left the silent Great Hall.

"Well, that was interesting," he said, "although not unexpected, given that explosion the other day."

"I don't trust it," Pansy growled. "I don't trust her."

"I'm not giving her my trust either," Hermione growled, before blushing as she realised that she had mimicked her favourite female lover's tone.

"I'm not saying that you should - she hasn't earned that yet," Harry said. "But other than the twins, no Weasley has the ability to plan for the long term that I've ever seen. She certainly has never shown a tendency toward long term thinking before. So I'm taking her words at face value. She has taken responsibility." He looked at them all carefully. "If she follows through and actually changes, I will be considering possibly extending the hand of friendship to her."

Hermione looked affronted at this. "Harry, she -"

"Don't I know better than anyone else what she did, Hermione?"

"She hurt you!" Hermione exclaimed plaintively, a bit louder than she'd meant to speak.

"I know that," he replied. "And now we really get to the heart of this, don't we? You want to protect me, and maybe you even worry that I'll make up with her and be done with all of you." The four girls looked somewhat abashed at his statement, making it obvious that the last was indeed their worry. He smiled and pushed his feelings toward them. All of his feelings. He knew that none of them were used to the link that had been formed on their wedding day. All four girls gasped, both Susan and Hermione moaned and began to shudder slightly, Luna bit her lower lip and Pansy simply unfocussed and smiled. "That's how I feel about the four of you," Harry explained. "All the love and arousal and everything else." He then pushed some sadness tinged with hope through the link at them. "That's how I feel about Ginny. The hope is that she can be redeemed; that she can turn her life around. I will never love her again, and she will never again share my bed under any circumstances I can imagine."

"That's an odd phrasing," Susan said.

"The universe likes to play with me. If I didn't add that little codicil, something would happen, I'm sure." He laughed after he said it. "Me, paranoid much?"

"CONSTANT VIGILANCE!" the five of them shouted in unison before bursting into laughter as food arrived on the tables.

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The five spent the next several weeks in planning. Harry's original plan to deal with Voldemort had been to blow himself up, but now he had a reason to keep living. One idea that was being worked on by both Hermione and Luna was seeing if a shield could be created that would protect from physical objects. No shield currently in use could do such a thing. Amelia Bones had already promised that the Aurors would pay the designer of such a spell top money for access to such magic.

Harry chuckled at how busy everyone who was in the know seemed. He was also amused by the ways that the rest of the school seemed to be trying to ingratiate themselves with him again. The Hufflepuffs had sent a delegation to give him a heartfelt apology and a promise to stay out of his way (if he so wished) as best they could for the remainder of the year. He relented, possibly because Hannah had been on the committee that had come to talk to him, and both Susan and Neville vouched for her.

One Tuesday afternoon headed into the library to see if there was anything new in the search. Looking around a bit, he found Hermione deep in the Restricted section, just putting a book on shields back on the shelf. He smiled and slid up behind her, sliding his hands up her front until he was cupping her breasts in his hands, enjoying the fact that she had apparently chosen to forego the bra. Pressed tightly against her, letting her feel his erection against her bare skin. "You know what I'm about to do, don't you?" he whispered to her. "I'm going to plant that baby inside you right here in the Library. You're going to want to scream out loud, but you're going to have to stay quiet, because if you don't, Madam Pince will never let you in here again." He undid his trousers slightly, lifted her skirt again and pressed his erection against her bare skin. "You have to remain as silent as humanly possible while I fulfil one of your fantasies by screwing you incoherent right here in the Library."

He felt a frisson of desire shoot through him as she moaned softly at his speech to her. "That turns you on more than anything else, doesn't it?" He nibbled her right ear as he whispered, "And think of how many people will be looking at you when you leave, the way your nipples are going to be straining against your blouse. You're going to be the wet dream of every boy you walk past today, after we make love."
He repositioned himself and placed the tip of his organ against her very wet opening and began to press forward, reveling in the insistent pulsing that he felt. What with the exercises and the position she was currently in, bent slightly forward with her legs close together, she was the tightest that Harry could ever remember her being. He slid slowly into her, letting his hands release the skirt to cover them again as his hands slid up and found her breasts again. He opened enough buttons to completely free her breasts and began to fondle them as he continued to drive her wild with his maddeningly slow lovemaking.

"How does that make you feel?" he whispered in her ear as he grasped his teeth along her ear lobe. "Knowing that we're making love just a few feet away from our fellow students; knowing that all it would take is one of them walking back here to catch us in the act? How does it feel knowing that I'm fucking you just mere feet from everyone?" He felt her clench once when he said 'fucking', but apparently the concept of just how easily they could be caught was too much for her. He felt her spasming against him, getting so tight that it became slightly painful. "Gods, woman, you're magnificent," he groaned as he felt her pulling against him. He suddenly released her breasts and slipped his hands back under her skirt, gripping her hips as he felt his own orgasm boiling up and into his wife, who was panting quietly as she thrust herself against him.

As they both quietly recovered, him still occasionally twitching and releasing just a little more into her, she said as softly as she could, "I have never had an orgasm that powerful, my love. I thought that I was going to pass out from the pleasure." She looked down her body and giggled. "I'm really going to be giving them wet dreams if we leave too soon, Harry. My nipples are throbbing."

He finally pulled out and helped her with her clothing. "Well then, shall I make the boys hate me, by showing off my sexy wife?" He crooked an arm to her.

"I'll need it," she giggled again. "I don't think I'll be able to walk straight without help." They both chuckled as they saw several boys shift in their seats as she walked through the library.

One girl said in a snarky voice, "Looks like she just got laid back there."

Harry just couldn't resist. "Jealous?" he asked angelically. The girl's look, as if she wanted to slink off somewhere and gnaw on her own liver, answered the question for him.

The other girls were glassy-eyed when they made it back to the suite that they shared. "Great Morganna!" Susan exclaimed. "That orgasm you gave her made us come, Harry! I didn't even come that hard when you spanked me into the New Year!"

Hermione was blushing. "Well, remember that libraries get me horny anyway. Then to have Harry sneak up behind me and flat-out tell me that he was going to fulfill my fantasy of making love in one made it worse. And then he reminded me that I couldn't make a sound."

"Add to that that you're a screamer when you really let go," Pansy purred.

"Yeah," Hermione breathed happily. "Having to hold that in made it that much more intense." She stopped and scowled for a moment before her eyes shot wide, and she leapt to her feet. She ran to one of the ever-present notebooks she left around the suite and began to write furiously.

"I recognise that look," Pansy said. "I think you were fertile in more ways than one. She's had an idea and a real corker, too."

"I'll have to test it, but I think that we have a method of blocking physical objects," Hermione said smugly, turning back to her husband and wives. "If I'm right, enough wizards could stop the physical effects of a nuclear device in the kiloton range." With a small smirk, she added, "Or just Harry could."

"I'm not that powerful," he said in mock annoyance.

"Depends on how you mean that," Luna said in a voice that dropped Harry's IQ a few points and raised his blood pressure – locally, at least.

"It just carne to me," Hermione said, eyes twinkling at the play on words. "The 'holding it in' comment was what made me think of it. Most protection spells build a shield that's actually rather nebulous, even if they look solid. That silver shield that Voldemort and the Headmaster can both cast, the one that rings whenever a spell hits it? – As wonderful for absorbing or reflecting energy as it is, if you throw a pebble at it, it'll go right through. But if we can compress the energy – harden it, or 'hold it in', if you will – we should be able to stop bullets and other physical objects. Since these shields already block energy, we should be able to stand in the middle of that carnage of yours and utterly annihilate Riddle."

"What is this 'we' you speak of?" he asked, a slight smile on his face.

"Don't we have this conversation on a regular basis?" Susan asked in slight exasperation. "Do you really think that we're going to let you do this on your own?"

"Do you know what it would do to me to know that I wasn't there to support my husband, when he needed me most?" Pansy asked softly.

"She's right, Harry," Luna agreed. "Hermione has come up with a spell that may well work, unless I miss my guess, but you'll need us there. I don't think that he'll just walk in and wait for you to press the button to cause such a violent exothermic reaction. You'll need people there to fight alongside you, and can you think of anyone who wants to keep you alive more than the four of us?"

He stopped and looked at them for a long moment. "It's just … I was … I was going to commit suicide by Voldemort back in December. From what I knew, the four of you were dead, and I was never going to see you again in this life. It was my decision then to speed things up and take out Voldemort quickly, so that I could see you sooner. He walked over and pulled Pansy into a tight hug. "I am so scared that the four of you will die at the last battle we'll ever have with Riddle, and that I'll survive without a scratch. I will have nothing to keep me here, but I won't be in a position to just make sure that I see you again quickly. I don't know what lies beyond, but I doubt that who or whatever it is rewards selfish suicide."
Well then," Susan said, "we'll just have to work very hard at keeping ourselves alive during the battle. We are not about to let you walk into that alone, and that is our final word on this." She looked sharply at him. "Do not fight us on this, Harry. If you think we'd handle your death any better than you would handle ours, you are very much mistaken."

"Despite your best efforts back in October," Pansy added, "we've decided that you are worth knowing and loving, Harry. We married you, didn't we?"

He opened his mouth to speak, but Hermione said, "Don't you dare say 'temporary insanity!' At his surprised look, she smirked. "I've known you for six and a half years, Harry. I think I can figure out some of what you were going to say."

He stared at them for a long moment before he finally said, "I don't really deserve any one of you, so how did I manage to have all four of you in love with me?" He pulled them all into a deep hug. "Two of you are carrying my children, and hopefully a third will be after today's escapades in the Library." He took a deep breath. "I spent so much time being hated by the Dursleys - Vernon enjoyed telling me to leave on my seventeenth birthday - that I couldn't help but internalise some of that. To know that four women who could crook their little finger and call any man they wanted to them simply because of how beautiful they are - well, it's humbling to someone like me. And I worry about losing you, especially to that coward, Riddle."

"You're somewhat biased, beloved," Luna said. "I know, quite honestly, that I am not classically beautiful. Not everyone looks at me and thinks that I'm attractive. I know this and accept it. But I also know how the rest of the world tends to look at me, so it humbles me to know that so honourable and loving a man was not only willing to look past that, but to accept me for who I am. Not every man could accept that I am in love with one woman, let alone three, yet you accept it willingly."

"It's who you are, and I fell in love with you. 'I love you, you're perfect, now change'? I don't think so. Honestly speaking, if it were physically possible, I'd adore children that two of you created together. I'm betting that a Hermione/Pansy mix would be especially pretty, although I'd probably have to teach her at an early age to defend herself from cads. And you and Susan? Another adorable child, I'll bet."

"We're getting pretty far afield," Susan said. "Can we all agree that none of us want any of the others to die and agree that we'll do everything we can to stay alive?"

Harry smiled and nodded at that and put his hand out. The others rested theirs on top of his, and a gentle golden pulse enveloped them all for just a moment.

"Oh my, I keep forgetting about that," Susan said a little breathlessly. "It's one thing to say how much you love someone, but to feel it like that -"

Luna looked solemn. "I swear that I will do everything in my power to keep us all alive. I never want to lose this feeling."

"Good," Hermione said. "You can help me work on refining this spell. My quick notes might make for a useful spell, but one that would probably tire out the caster pretty quickly. I want to come up with maximum power for minimum energy."

Pansy got a look in her eyes and grabbed Harry by the arm. "Maybe make it a spell powered by sex and have Harry shag us all just before the last battle?" She grinned and said, "In fact, I think Harry and I should go practice right now." She dragged him into the bedroom, and the other girls quickly developed smiles as they felt the love and joy flowing through their link. Their smiles morphed into dreamy, glazed looks as Pansy's delighted orgasm exploded through the group connection.
Like A Phoenix From The Ashes
Chapter 16

Harry was spending a great deal of time, when not in classes, down in the Potions dungeons, in a little used laboratory. He had the Potions Master's attention because there was no magic being used for the concoctions that he was making. Finally curiosity got the better of the man in the middle of February, just before Valentine's Day.

" Explosives, sir. These are Muggle explosives that I'm making. I'm going to seed that area heavily before you pass the information along, but I need the material with which to seed, after all."

" Is there anything I can do to help you? " Snape asked.

Harry turned to face the man. " I appreciate that. " He thought for a long moment. " I'd imagine that Tom is expecting some magic there. I can't imagine that he'd be so arrogant as to see me there, not detect any magic, and assume that I was utterly without back-up. He's paranoid enough to decide that something must be up. If you can come up with something magical that you know his defences can withstand, but that might take out some of his Death Eaters, I'd really appreciate it. If he sees me set that sort of thing off and he walks through it basically unscathed, that might make him feel arrogant and let his guard down."

" He never lets his guard down, at least not completely, " Severus Snape replied with a darkly wry smile. As an afterthought, he added, " Harry."

Harry's eyebrows rose, but he smiled and accepted the offered olive branch. It had taken most of the year, but Snape was finally taking the next step beyond their truce. " At this rate, I should be ready for him by late March, or possibly late April, which is the very end of the time span I've allotted myself. I intend to churn the soil in that area very heavily, Professor, and see if I can add as many Death Eaters as I can to the soil mixture."

Snape blinked for a moment at the imagery before changing the subject. " In a situation where we are alone such as this, I will not complain if you call me Severus, " he said slowly.

Harry stopped completely and turned to face the man who had been his nemesis all these years. " I appreciate that more than I can say … Severus."

After a very short pause he added, " I don't remember whether or not I've done it before, but I think it needs doing. " He stood straighter and said, " I'd like to think that my father would have realised that he was being a bully and eventually apologised, but he's not here to do that. Therefore, in my father's stead I apologise for what was done to you during your time as a student at Hogwarts, and I apologise for whatever further pain I myself may have caused once I was here."

For the first time that Harry could remember, the Potions Master smiled. Not a smile of anticipation of a prank or a revenge going off, nor the smile of someone forced to respond with politeness, but a smile of acceptance. " I can easily live with that … Harry. Now, let us 'get down to business', as the saying goes."

" One last thing, " Harry said. " I'll likely say it again when we get closer to D-day, but I'd like to get to know the real Severus Snape, so I'd appreciate it if you didn't die."

Severus returned a somewhat lopsided smile that looked as if his trademark sneer were attempting to make an appearance. " I'll do my best, " was his only comment, in a voice Harry recognised all too well. He chuckled quietly to himself as they jointly continued Harry's work.

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Whenever the ladies had somewhere else to be, Harry had taken to walking the halls under his Invisibility Cloak, just to avoid being stopped by the average student who tried lamely to apologise. He'd been intrigued to note that many of the Gryffindors had tried in ones and twos, but that Ron Weasley had made no effort to approach him. He'd forgiven the first and second year students pretty much across the board, in all Houses, simply because there was no real way for them to have gotten to know him. The third year students were largely forgiven as well, save the few who had taken their dislike during the year to some extremes, what with following the older students' examples. Fourth year and above were pretty much out of luck, although he tended to forgive those who simply accepted their fault and made no effort to ingratiate themselves with him, such as Ginny had done. A few people had apparently learned the lesson he'd tried to teach.

It was a week after the peace declaration between Severus and him. He was rounding a corner near the Potions laboratory he was using, intending to check on his latest batch of explosives, when he came across Ginny and Ron talking in the hallway. " Why don't you apologise to him, Ron? You'll never be his best friend anymore, but you at least owe it to him to tell him that you were like the rest of our family - an idiot."

Ron's reaction told Harry a lot; he simply nodded.

" Damn, " Ginny added. " You must be depressed. That would normally have gotten you angry, even if I pointed out that I get hit with the 'idiot' label too."

" I can't apologise to him yet, " Ron said. " Part of me wants to work my way back into his friendship, but that's never going to happen. Until the day that I can say it and simply mean it as an apology and not a way to get back in with him, I won't do it. I hurt him badly in fourth year, and then I … damn it, he was almost my brother, and I turned on him like he was a Malfoy! I should have known that he wouldn't ever do what Bill and Charlie said! I should have told them to go fuck themselves unless they could bring me physical proof! Instead, I just sat there and did a Crabbe and Goyle - let someone else do my thinking. So until I can get my brain in gear and working for me, and not wait for someone else to tell me what to think, I'm not apologising, because I wouldn't completely mean it. When I can say it and walk away, knowing that I've said goodbye to the best friend I ever had, then I'll say it. Right now it would include some hope that he might accept me back as a friend, despite … " He paused for a long moment before starting up again. " How the mighty have fallen, you know, Gin? We Weasleys are so damned proud of our integrity. " He barked out a brutal,
Ron looked at her for a long moment before sighing. "You're right, Gin. I need to find him and say it. Maybe I can even convince him that I'm not asking for forgiveness, even if I do have that stupid little part of me insisting that I deserve to be forgiven." He shook his head and turned toward Harry's invisible form.

Harry slid into a nearby niche as he watched the two walk by.

He thought about what he'd heard as he finished his intended task in the potions laboratory and walked slowly back through halls rarely used. He noticed footprints in some of the dust on the floors, showing that even Filch rarely got to these halls, and decided to follow them. As he neared the door that they led to, he heard the muffled report of what sounded like a firearm from inside. He opened the door to see Hermione with a rifle at her shoulder, taking aim at Pansy, who was grinning madly against the far wall of the deep room. Before he could say anything, another shot rang out, driving Hermione back slightly, and the impact drove Pansy back slightly as well.

Harry ripped off his cloak as he stepped into the room, confusion and panic fighting for space in his expression. "What the hell are you doing?" he yelled in a voice just seconds from hysteria.

"Testing a new defence in the war against Dark wizards," Hermione said sweetly, carefully setting the rifle down and then taking her now shaking husband into her arms. "I'm sorry, but this is why we didn't tell you."

He looked over to Pansy and was surprised to see her stripping out of the blouse she was wearing, exposing a vest of some sort. Luna murmured to Reparo Charm on the blouse and then helped Pansy out of the vest, exposing the black lace bra that Harry liked so much.

"It's a dragon-hide vest based on Muggle bullet-proof vests" Pansy explained. "The outer layer is the heavy hide from the back of the dragon, with the scales still on. Then beneath the dragon skin is a series of cold iron plates. We'd prefer steel, but cold iron is far better for stopping magic than steel is. We put a lightening charm on it because the iron is heavy, and because it's fragile and likely to shatter, we added an inner layer of the thin hide from the dragon's belly, with no scales that might tear the lining. That will stop any bits with sharp edges that might try to poke into the wearer. Then we added a lining of heavy silk spelled not to rip and cast every cushioning charm we could think of. So far it's stopped a twenty-two pistol and long-range rifle, both shot from what might well be considered point blank range. It has also stopped a Webley thirty-eight calibre and a Webley forty-five-five from the same range. I've yet to even feel anything, and before you ask, we did tests against a dummy first, but no dummy I know of can tell you how much force is making it through the vest, so I volunteered to wear it. Cheap heroics, since I already know that it can take the force of a shotgun slug at literal point blank range without breaking the cold iron plates." She laughed. "I really sound like I know what I'm talking about with the firearms, don't I?"

"That's because you've been listening to me, love," Hermione said. "I come from a military family. Mum and Dad both did a stint in the Army, although Dad was the one who did the firearms work." She laughed. "It's illegal as hell, but I've known how to handle a pistol and a rifle since I was old enough to be taught how dangerous they are. I had to be talked into firing at Pansy. I was trained never to point a weapon at someone unless I wanted them dead, and … well, I think you can tell that the only death I want her experiencing is the little one, if you get my meaning."

"It needs to be done, Hermione," Susan said. "And by waiting until we were sure that the vests could stop everything that we can throw at it, it makes it safer on her. And you forgot to mention that Kelvar or Kevlar or whatever stuff that sits between the belly hide and the silk."

"Still," he said, a little shakily, "to open the door and see one of my wives shooting at another one with a deadly weapon."

"I know," Hermione said, "but it needs to be done."

"And I'm the only one with any real idea about Muggle equipment like this. Hell, I'm closer to Luna and Susan in my understanding of it, but we needed a target that can talk back and tell her when it hurts. By the way, love? Still nothing."

"Are those fitted to each of us, or one size fits all?" Harry asked, finally calming down enough to start thinking again.

"The prototype, which this is, fits anyone," Pansy said. "We've got an armourer ready to fit them when we've finished our tests." She grinned. "Being one of the wealthiest families around is nice at times like this."

"Your family is paying for this?" Harry asked. "They shouldn't have to. I'll talk to them."

"- and have them point out to you that it is the least that they can do since they don't really have the skill to get involved with the fighting. Dad's working to get you some more explosives, by the way. I think he said something like 'There's no kill like overkill' when he told me what he was doing."

He picked up the vest and looked at it for a long moment. He could see the rough silk lining the inside, and ran his hands along the inside until he felt a slit, held closed with a charm, at the edge of an inner pocket. He opened it and then slid out a heavy sheet of iron, which he examined for a
had to be you wearing the vest when I fired the Barrett.”

"The most important part of it is a dud." She put these prototypes, Harry," Hermione replied. "We knew that there’d be more work to be done, but there’s no sense in building the entire suit if better coverage below the waist."

"I’m fine, Hermione," he assured his wife. "I didn’t even feel the impact," she said, her voice quavering slightly. "I need to keep checking, though," he answered her, and undid the bra clasp between her breasts. The black fabric fell away, and he unconsciously bit his lower lip as her erect nipples came into view. He leaned forward and kissed them both gently, making her moan. "Nope. No bruising here," he murmured.

"You evil man," she whispered back. "You know that we don’t have time for what we both want right now. Why are you arousing me now, of all times, when we’re going to have to go to classes within the next hour?"

"A promise for later, my wife. Not just a desire, but a promise." He stood and cupped her breasts for a moment, teasing her nipples once more, and then cupped her cheek. "My beloved Pansy. Do you have any idea how terrified I was to see you on the receiving end of a rifle shot, even knowing that the others were in the room and watching?"

"We’re sorry," Hermione said. "Our problem is that we’re not done with the testing. It seems that the twenty-two calibre rifle is completely unable to be felt, so now we have to step things up."

"Right you are," he said as he watched Pansy reluctantly redo her bra. While her hands were busy, he picked up the vest and slid it on, quickly figuring out how to get it snug and secure. "Okay, what’s the next weapon? Actually, what’s the most powerful weapon that you have available right now?"

"Uncle Ted got me a Barrett fifty calibre," Hermione replied slowly. "Fired it from about this distance, and it dented the iron plates in the vest. That’s it over there." She pointed at a weapon against the wall. The thing looked heavy, and he could believe that it was a powerful weapon.

"Okay," he said. "Set it up and I’ll stand against the far wall."

"This one could hurt - it could even break your ribs!" Hermione exclaimed.

"I know a little about these things because of dear delightful Duddikins and his … shall we say ‘penchant for violence’? The weapon dented the plates in the vest from this range. A Barrett is designed to do that from well over a mile away, if not break right through them. It should have torn right through the vest and the iron plate when fired from this close. That tells me that I’ll have a bruise, and maybe a broken rib or six, but nothing will happen that a handful of potions won’t fix in nothing flat. They still looked dubious. "You wouldn’t have brought it if you weren’t sure that whoever was wearing the vest would survive it, and while I might not be able to stop you from firing these things at living targets - it gives us much needed information - I can keep your perfect bodies from developing imperfections."

Hermione shook her head for a moment. "I want to argue, but you’re right. We need a target wearing the vest. We’re also going to need to test how they handle the explosives, but we have to find somewhere other than the school for that."

She went to the wall and carefully picked up the Barrett. It was slow going, considering the weight of the weapon. Once on the table, she ensured that the safety was on before loading a single impressively large bullet into it and then righting it onto its tripod. While she did this, Luna, Susan and Pansy triple-layered Silencing Charms throughout the room, and then donned heavy earmuffs. Raising an eyebrow, Harry concluded that it would be a good idea to cast a Deafness Charm on himself.

He decided that this had been the correct action when he watched Hermione prepare herself and then pull the trigger. He saw the smoke come from the barrel at the same instant that he felt himself impacted in the chest. It staggered him back a few steps - or would have if he hadn’t been flat against the wall - and it felt as if he had been hit in the chest by a rhinoceros charging at full speed. He took a deep breath, which was not as easy or painless as it should have been, and cancelled the Deafness Charm.

"I have but one thing to say at a time like this," he said with a small laugh. "Ow. That felt … well, I will admit that it hurt." His wives were rapidly undoing the vest and peeling his clothes off him. "Pansy," he said with a grin, "I wasn't hit below the waist."

"I need to be sure," she said with a wicked grin. In very short order he was being thoroughly distracted from the work being done on his chest by Luna and Susan. Pansy was very skilled with her tongue, after all.

Several minutes later, after Pansy had finished distracting him, he looked for Hermione and found her looking at the plate from the vest. The dimple was not overly pronounced, but it existed. Her eyes were suspiciously bright. "I'm fine, Hermione," he assured his wife.

"It cracked a rib, Harry!" she cried.

"Yes. It cracked a rib from a range that should have left an exit hole big enough for a firstie to stand up in. It's a powerful weapon - we knew this. And I survived it. I'd say that the vests are a success so far. All we need to do now is to test them versus explosions and then practice your charm and see what it will stop." He paused for a moment. "You are aware that if the charm fails against the explosion, everyone wearing your vests will leave behind perfect bodies with no recognisable heads, arms or legs? There’s no covering for those parts. And I really think that there should be better coverage below the waist."

"These are prototypes, Harry," Hermione replied. "We knew that there’d be more work to be done, but there’s no sense in building the entire suit if the most important part of it is a dud." She put her arms on her hips and developed a somewhat angry look. "And you still haven’t explained why it had to be you wearing the vest when I fired the Barrett."
He cupped her cheek. "I had a feeling it was going to do that to whoever was wearing the vest, so I decided that it should be me who feels that kind of pain."

Hermione looked at him, some heat entering her gaze. "So you decided that we were too frail to experience the pain?"

He smiled indulgently, despite the aforementioned cracked rib. "No, I decided that if it was in my power to protect you from anything, I would. It's the same as you deciding to build these vests in order to have as many of us survive the upcoming battle as possible. I had it within my power to prevent one of you from getting cracked ribs, so I did. Besides, I have a history of dealing with pain, so I'm far more used to it that anyone else, except maybe our pretty little flower." He scowled. "I just know that I'm going to run into that little ferret again someday, even if he is supposed to have ended up in prison."

Susan scowled in answer. "Auntie told me that Narcissa and Draco escaped custody during the transfer a few days ago. Considering that it left a dead Auror team behind, it was definitely Voldemort freeing them."

Harry looked thunderous for a moment. "Okay. Next time I see either of them, I hex first and ask questions later. They've already stated that they're solidly in Voldemort's camp, so I just kill them, rather than run the risk of letting them start a rebellion after Tom's gone."

"I'd like to complain," Hermione said slowly, "but he was the one wielding the wand when that block nearly kill us."

"I just know that he's too stupid to have learned his lesson. With luck, he'll try to fire a Killing Curse at me."

"With luck?" she shrieked.

"Remember what happened when he fired that Bludgeoning Curse from point blank range? It never reached me. Instead, it blasted him against the wall. I doubt that the Killing Curse would hit me. The curse he invoked on himself will see to that."

"So, how'd the armour fare? I can see the dent in the iron, which is what we expected, but how about the armour itself?"

"Apparently, dragon hide has a regenerative ability that continues after the death of the dragon," Luna said. "At least those dragons that died naturally, the way that the ones that supplied the hide for these vests did. There was a noticeable dent in the dragon hide for a short time, but there is no sign of where the impact happened now. A new plate where the old one was, and the whole vest should be just fine."

"It was in our best interests to wait for a dragon that died naturally, ignoring all the worries about poaching and Thundering Snifflehumpers. The hide gets tougher as they age, so the hide of an old dragon will be significantly tougher than that of a young one."

"We should study to see if the regenerative qualities are in all dragon hides," Hermione said. "It could give an economic excuse for conservation."

"I want us all in these vests, even if they can't handle the explosion we'll be setting off, just in case that marvellous shield of yours lets some debris through at higher speed than we'd like."

"There's no way in hell I'm going to convince you three not to be there, is there?" he asked, looking at Susan, Luna and Hermione.

"Nope. We're pregnant, not invalids," Susan said cheerfully. "I will not be so large as to make being there an imposition for everyone, and me sitting here at Hogwarts worrying about my husband will be just as troublesome for the baby as my being there to worry. Besides, the more people you have to power the shield spell, the stronger it will be."

"Pity the mad, passionate sex thing didn't help the shield strength," Pansy purred.

"No, but it sure helped my sense of mental well-being, as well as my cardiovascular system," he replied with a laugh as he gave her a hug. "Think you could work on helmets and something to protect the tummy and thighs? Just to keep those babies behind as much armour as possible?"

"More design work."

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They talked with the Headmaster and found a good site for their tests - a quarry in Wales that saw some sporadic use, so the occasional explosion wouldn't be seen as too out of place. The tests took place at the end of February, and the armour performed far better than they could have expected - the dragon hide survived the explosion easily. The lining, which had been open to the air during the test, took some damage, but since the wearers shouldn't be exposing those parts of the armour, this was not deemed to be a problem. The iron plates took a fair amount of damage and the metal helmet form was cracked, but all in all it looked like most of the critical parts of the wearer's anatomy would be protected.

"We need to test one more thing, I'm sorry to say," Harry said after their impromptu celebration. "You know that Tom's people will be throwing a certain sickly green spell around as if it were a Tickling Charm. We need to see if the armour will protect against that."

"Loath as I am to admit it, Harry is correct," Dumbledore added. "I shall tell Amelia that we have a potential protection, but we need to test it."

"I'll talk with her as well, if you'd like. If it's explained that it was designed to help me survive to destroy our local Dork Lord, then she might be a little happier about it."

"Dork Lord?" Dumbledore asked with a smile.

"Just giving him all the respect he deserves," Harry replied impudently.
Amelia Bones actually came to the site when Harry called her, and was suitably impressed by the power of the Barrett when Hermione shattered a boulder half a mile away. Her eyes nearly dropped from her head when Harry said that he had survived being shot by that weapon simply by wearing the armour they were showing her. "Broke my ribs, but I was twenty feet away from it, and you saw what it did to that boulder half a mile away. I think I described the hole it should have left in me as 'large enough for a firstie to stand up in'?" He frowned. "Now we need to test the vests versus the one curse that everyone says can't be stopped. The Killing Curse."

"If it can't be stopped -" she began.

"It can be, though," Harry interrupted. "Get a piece of hard material in the way and the curse shatters it but the spell is stopped. It's a physical blow as well as a magical one. What we need to test is whether or not this vest can stop a Killing Curse." He grinned. "Can you imagine the Dork Lord's reaction to seeing someone getting hit by a Killing Curse and not falling down dead?"

"Dork Lord?" Amelia asked with a slight smile. "And how can the vest stop the curse?"

"Well, you saw what that weapon does? I was wearing the vest, as I said, when it was fired from a few feet away. Besides, when was the last time you heard of a dragon being dropped from a single Killing Curse?"

"Do you mean to stand there and tell me that we might have had the means for blocking the curse within our grasp all this time?"

"Quite possibly," Harry said grimly. "But we need to test it."

"Very well," Amelia said. "On the condition that I be the one to cast the curse. After all, I do head the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, so it should be fairly easy for me to justify." She laughed slightly. "Especially if it works." She looked at them for a moment. "Man-sized animal, I think."

"Three tests," Harry added. "First, with the animal stunned."

"Why?" she asked.

"Honestly, if we're wrong about this protecting against the Killing Curse, I'd like its last moments to be peaceful, not filled with terror. If it survives getting hit the first time, we try it again still stunned without the plates in the way to see if it's just the dragon-hide armour that helps against the magic. If it survives the second, we put new plates in and wake it up to see if being unconscious was the difference."

Hermione was beaming, as were his other wives, and both Amelia Bones and Albus Dumbledore were looking at him with mixed expressions of pride and surprise. "Just when I think that I cannot be any more proud of you, Harry, you do something like this," Albus said.

"What?" he asked, honestly puzzled by the reaction.

"You care, beloved," Susan replied, hugging him. "You worry about the animal that's going to be subjected to this test, while most people would simply not think about it, because it's nothing more than an animal."

"It's a living, breathing thing," Harry responded, and it was obvious that he didn't see why it was so unusual. "Animals can get scared, too."

"And that, Albus," said Amelia, "is why there are no worries about him becoming the next Dark Lord."

They walked from the quarry a few days later, after testing the vests against the Killing Curse. The pig they'd used was simply happy to get away from the humans. The humans all had stunned looks on their faces. "I knew the theory," Amelia said, "but to see it in action -"

"And that Auror deserves an Order of Merlin," Harry said. "Watching the armour protect an animal is one thing, but to volunteer for having someone shoot a Killing Curse at you ... hell, after that, I'd say put the pig out for stud duty – to hell with him gracing a dinner table." He turned to Hermione and the others. "You're aware that if you weren't married, the four of you would have received multiple proposals for your contribution to Auror safety?"

"And the spell you've designed will make you rich beyond the dreams of avarice," Amelia added.

"I already am," she said, hugging Harry's arm tightly. "I have a wonderful husband. Everything else is just icing on the cake." He hugged her back and pulled a water bottle from the small pack that they'd brought with them.

"Too much icing?" Amelia asked with a wide grin. "Is that why three of the four of you are getting a tad chubby around the middle?"

"It's more along the lines of enjoying the cream filling a little too much," Luna said with a straight face. Luckily no one was in front of Harry at that moment, otherwise they would have been drenched as he did a classic spit take. The Aurors trailing them were trying very hard not to laugh, but nothing was stopping Amelia and Albus from laughing heartily as Harry coughed.

"I may spank you for that," he finally said, eyes twinkling madly.

"Susan is the one who prefers that," Luna replied with a dreamy smile, drawing a squeak of embarrassed outrage from Susan.

"Maybe I should tie you down, then?" he asked, wiggling an eyebrow.

"Promises, promises," she replied, her voice just a little breathier than previous. Harry smiled to himself as she proved that she was definitely equipped to feed the child she carried inside her.
"We should likely stop the foreplay before Grandpa Albus gets jealous," he said with a laugh. He noticed quickly, however, that the Headmaster had come to a complete stop. "Sir?"

"My apologies, Harry," the man said. "I likely read too much into the statement."

"Not likely," came Harry's reply. "I don't have any family other than these beautiful women and their families. The Dursleys are gladly shut of me, which they made sure I was well aware of. Don't apologise, sir," he said quickly as the Headmaster opened his mouth. "It was a necessity. But as I was saying, I might as well complete my family of choice. I have any number of in-laws to play the mother and father parts, but I would be honoured if you would allow my children to think of you as 'Grandfather'." He walked over and pulled the man into a hug. "And maybe even let me think of you that way?" he added softly.

"It is I who am honoured, Harry. That you can offer that after the life I unwittingly forced you into speaks for your character more than any words could ever express. I will proudly act as great-grandfather for your children and likely spoil them rotten." He returned the hug. "And perhaps a little spoiling of you as well."

"You'll probably have competition in that, sir," Hermione said. "As much as my parents have always said that they're too young to be grandparents, they've certainly gone into overdrive now that they know that I'm carrying Harry's child. And they love Harry as if he were their own."

"I think if Daddy were undignified enough to do so, he'd emulate the Squiffling Nosehopper, which, despite its name, makes something of a squeeing noise. He cried when I told him what you want to name our girl," she added as an aside to Harry.

Harry chuckled to himself as he heard the animal's name. During one late night session of post-coital conversation, she'd admitted that she enjoyed making up creatures on the spot. She felt that certain ones did exist, such as the Snorkack (although she admitted that it might be known under another name, much as the Diricawl is the supposedly extinct Dodo), but largely she did it because she actually enjoyed the looks that people developed. Those who looked past it were definitely worth knowing. "Biblically, in at least one case," she had purred at him, which led to them being tired in classes the next morning for the best of reasons.

"You know something?" he asked with a sudden explosion of laughter as his mind returned to the here and now. "We're going to win this! We've got armour that will stop at least a couple of Killing Curses, a shield that stops physical attacks, which will protect the people there from the debris that the explosions will bring, and we've got a man – me – who wants to rid the world of the festering sore that is Voldemort so that he can raise his children in peace. We can't help but win." He cupped Susan's cheek in his hand before kissing her gently, and then ran his other hand across Pansy's cheek. With an impish grin he added, "And I've got another child to conceive, since Pansy here swore not to get pregnant until after Tom was dirt." Becoming serious, he laid a hand on Hermione and Luna's as yet barely swollen bellies. "I have everything in the world to live for."
Harry spoke to each of the teachers and asked their forbearance in permitting his occasional absence from classes. Between his willingness to show that he was slightly ahead of the curriculum (thanks to his wives) and the Headmaster's well timed comments stating that he was doing certain errands for him, Harry found the professors quite willing to permit his occasional freedom during their class time. On the first Saturday in May, Harry found himself being assisted by his wives as well as Severus Snape out at Godric's Hollow. The group of them had paired up to bury a large number of small objects into shallow holes which were then covered back up.

Brushing his hands as the last one was placed, Harry said, "Thank you, Severus. The extra hands help a lot."

The girls blinked for a moment, and Harry suddenly realised that this was the first time that they'd ever heard him call their Potions professor by his given name.

"It's all right," he said to them. "We've buried the hatchet and didn't even come near each other with it." He wasn't sure, but he thought he heard Severus snort his laughter at that comment.

Changing the subject, Harry said, "We're going to need to make sure that the Ministry is prepared for whatever story we think will work best. This is going to be one big explosion, and the Muggles will not be able to ignore it, no matter how much they may want to."

Hermione spoke up. "With the explosion area being as large as you intend, probably the best bet is to involve the military. Make it a bomb that accidentally released from a plane on manoeuvres." Harry nodded his agreement.

A few hours later, they were all sweaty and filthy. Harry's eyes sparkled for a moment, but he quashed the incipient grin and said, "Well, all we need now is to get ol' Snake-lips here."

"How will you detonate them?" Hermione asked. "None of us buried anything that even remotely seemed like a blasting cap or detonator."

"I can show you back at the school," he said. "I've already verified that I can detonate them from quite a distance."

Pansy cocked her head in silent query.

He answered, "Remember some of those 'unexplained' geysers in the lake? Those were caused by me. The explosives are waterproof, at least as far as my purposes are concerned, and I warned the merfolk and Sebastian to avoid where I put the small amounts of explosive."

"Sebastian?" Susan asked.

"The squid. I was able to detonate the small charges in the lake from a greater distance … let's put it this way. I could stand on the other side of Godric's Hollow and set these off without a problem."

He looked over at the lawn and was pleased with what he saw. "A few Muggle Repellent Charms and a week to let the ground settle back down and we should be ready to deal with Tom for the very last time. Let's get back to Hogwarts and let the Headmaster know."

Severus said, "I recommend that I contact the Headmaster concerning our readiness. I would imagine that the five of you are in dire need of a shower or bath." His eyes sparkled for the first time anyone could remember. "I would also recommend time saving measures - make it a group effort. The smirk on his face was friendly in nature, and Susan impulsively leapt at him and kissed his cheek, pulling back with flaming cheeks as soon as she realised what she had done.

His face took on a stern look as he said, "For such an unprovoked attack on a teacher, ten points to Hufflepuff. As they all began to look angry, while Harry snorted in laughter, he added, "Another fifty if you do that in the Great Hall during dinner."

That was too much for Harry, and he fell to the ground, laughing.

"What are you laughing at, Harry James Potter?" Hermione asked sharply.

"You're angry because he gave points to Susan! And promised another fifty if she does it in the Great Hall!" The girls blinked for a moment and then simultaneously blushed.

"Sorry, sir," Hermione said softly, her head down.

"Quite alright, Hermione," Severus said. "I am much different than the man that you are used to after six years of abuse." He frowned. "Quite honestly, I have been something of a … what was the phrasing I heard a seventh year use last year … ah yes - 'a self-centred prick with delusions of adequacy'. When Riddle is finally gone, I believe that I shall make future generations of students deliriously happy and retire."

"Well, if my attempts to secure an island work out, I could always offer you space on it to do your Potions research," Harry said.

"Buying an island?" Pansy asked. "How did you manage to start this process without us finding out?" Her tone was slightly dangerous.

"You were testing the armour and the weapons and such," he said, worry entering his voice for the first time. "I really do want to leave the wizarding world for a time when this is done, so I asked the goblins about some options, and they suggested an island in a more tropical climate."

"A short pause he added, "And who said anything about buying it?"
She walked forward and kissed him gently. "I'm not mad at you, Harry. I'm just annoyed that you managed to out-Slytherin me. Especially if you're not buying the thing."

"Well, you did accuse him of turning you Gryffindor at one point," Susan said with a smirk.

"By injection is my guess," Luna said with an utterly straight face. The others knew that she was good at delivering the most outrageous lines with a straight face, but this was Severus's first encounter with it.

He went utterly still. "Thank you, I do not need that image in my head," he finally said in his characteristic drawl.

Harry batted his eyes at him. "Don't you love me anymore?" he asked in an over-the-top voice.

Severus couldn't help it; he laughed quickly. "Away with the lot of you!"

Laughing, they all touched the Portkey that the Headmaster had created for them and appeared in an unused classroom near the entrance hall. He peeled away quickly to go to his quarters, while they met eyes and headed toward the prefect's bath.

It was a much cleaner and very tired group that exited two hours later.

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The students were surprised when Susan kissed Severus's cheek and were further surprised when he merely smiled slightly at her.

The Hufflepuffs never did figure out why they had fifty more points than they thought they should.

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Harry was getting nervous as the week progressed because the group was waiting for the word as to when they could head to Godric's Hollow. He was fighting quite hard not to snap at everyone, and the stress relief that his wives provided him was considered a blessing by the entire school.

It was on the second Friday of the month that Harry was approached by Ron Weasley, much to Harry's surprise. He'd wondered where the other young wizard had disappeared to after hearing the conversation with Ginny over a month previously. "Mr. Potter, may I speak with you?"

"Certainly," was Harry's response, eyes quirking in curiosity.

"I'm probably going to screw this up like I seem to do on everything else," Ron said with a sigh. Taking a deep breath, the red-head stated bluntly, "I was an ass, and I am seeing what I lost when I screwed up a year ago. Part of me still wants to try to work things out with you, but I worked too hard to really permanently fuck our friendship over." He turned and faced the wall, making fists in his frustration. "I swear, if we keep on the way we have been, our family will spawn a new saying - 'stupid as a Weasley'." He shook his head and turned back to Harry, arms and hands being forced into relaxation. "Never mind that. What I want to say is that I'm sorry, and that I'm not going to bother you again. I'll miss our friendship, but its loss is no less than I deserve after betraying you again." With that, he turned and walked away from Harry.

"That was interesting," he said later in his suite. "That was … y'know, that was the Ron Weasley I knew in my first few years here. If they actually learn from this, I can see being warmer toward the Weasleys. They'll never be family to me again, but part of me misses being able to visit that silly, ramshackle house of theirs and swim in the pond." He looked at his wives, who had various looks on their faces, none of them entirely happy.

"Look, I need to learn some level of forgiveness. If I don't, then I run the risk of letting my anger fester until I've decided that the best way to deal with something is through violence, and that direction lies the danger of becoming a Dark Lord. So I'd rather learn to forgive. Besides, both Ron and Ginny have done it the right way - accept responsibility and move on, rather than demanding our forgiveness and friendship."

Pansy scowled deepest for a moment, and then Harry literally felt her epiphany. "You're right," she said. "If they've learnt, you should forgive them."

This drew startled looks from the others. They well knew Pansy's opinions concerning the Weasley family.

"I was the bitch queen for the first several years here," she said. "If you followed the advice I've been giving you in regard to the Weasley family, then I'd be turning you into a hypocrite. If you had acted that way a year and a half ago, then my parents might be dead, and I'd still be subjected to the Ferret."

The others nodded slowly, working it through for themselves.

Harry smiled slightly as he felt each of them begin to understand. "I'll look them both up and talk to them. I'd kinda like 'em to stay alive to see if we can get friendly again." With that he headed for Gryffindor Tower.

He was always kept apprised of the passwords, being Head Boy, so he offered a polite greeting to the Fat Lady before he entered Gryffindor Tower. "Ron? Ginny? Can I speak to the two of you for a minute?" Startled, they exited the Tower behind him.

"How can we help you?" Ginny asked formally.

"By staying alive when this whole thing comes to a head. We'll never be family again, I have to tell you, but you two have learned a lesson that not everyone else has. For that, you've earned the possibility of a second chance at some type of friendship. It won't happen immediately, if ever, but if you two die, it can't happen. So please, if all hell breaks loose and you end up in the middle of it somehow, please try to stay safe, okay?" They both nodded in shock, and he turned and headed back to the suite, leaving them staring after him.
"Is there such a thing?" Hermione quipped with sparkling eyes. She blushed. "Damn it," she said with a mock scowl. "I'm supposed to be a Slytherin princess, and you've got me blushing like a Gryffindor virgin!"

He let his eyes twinkle at her. "I think it's much more fun to be with people who wear them. It's like a present, and it's so much fun doing the unwrapping. And it's the gift that you can rewrap another, I want you guys to either lie low, or if you want to help defend, I know I won't turn down the help."

"We're all affected, so why shouldn't you be able to fight? Hopefully we won't have to worry about it here, but we'd be glad to have you." He shook his head. "I'm seventeen, a few months away from being a father, and I've never been happier in my life. If you think I'm going to be heroically suicidal, you've got another think coming to you."

"I'm sure you would," Pansy said with a smirk, having heard Harry's last sentence. "Girl doesn't use or need a bra, damn her."

He approached the Headmaster on Monday. "Not to be a pain, sir, but when are we going to be able to do this thing? It needs to end, so that I can get on with my life."

"You seem to have pre-empted my calling you to talk about just that." He motioned Harry to a seat. "Severus and I have been working not only on the story that he will tell Voldemort, but on something physical that Severus can let him see in his mind, if Voldemort acts as we believe he will. It took far longer than any of us would have liked, I must admit. My intention is to allow Severus the chance to leave on a 'family emergency' tonight, allowing him to tell our story and get him on the road to Godric's Hollow on Saturday. If all works as we hope, we shall be free of the threat of Voldemort by Sunday."

"I request the same of you, Harry. You have children to watch grow up." He paused before adding, "I will add that I am pleased that you are offering the olive branch to them." He didn't have to explain which "them" he was referring to.

"I don't like the person I'd be if I held a grudge. A very smart man showed me that second chances are a good thing." He smiled at Albus, then followed it with a frown. "If the article Narcissa sent me in December had been true, the whole situation would be radically different, Albus," Harry replied. "But now I have little Lorelei to watch enter Hogwarts with her brothers and sisters." He shook his head. "I'm seventeen, a few months away from being a father, and I've never been happier in my life. If you think I'm going to be heroically suicidal, you've got another think coming to you."

"I am terribly pleased to hear that, Harry." He smiled widely for a moment before continuing on. "In regards to our previous conversation, a contingent of Aurors that I trust will be entering Hogwarts on Friday during the day. Nominally it is under the explanation that we have had a problem at this school for the past six years at this time of year, so preparedness is better than surprise. In actuality, they will be leaving from here to head to Godric's Hollow an hour before any of us head out Saturday."

"I am so looking forward to the end of this, you know?" Harry asked, popping a sherbet lemon into his mouth and making Albus smile in delight. Harry face puckered for a moment as the sour struck him full force, and then gave his own smile in return. "I think I understand why you like these things!"

"Yes, I see them as a metaphor for life. A little sour in spots, but overall quite sweet and enjoyable."

"I can agree with that," Harry said. "I suppose I ought to get back to those who make me complete, to be poetic about it, so that they can stop worrying about what I might be doing here. Don't be surprised if they look you over carefully at dinner tonight to make sure you have all your body parts." Albus laughed at the comment and ushered Harry from his office after a final hug.

Harry walked over to the Slytherin table during lunch on Tuesday, stopping in front of Daphne Greengrass, one of the moderates who had gained power when Draco and his ilk had been forced to flee or get an intimate knowledge of prison. Without preamble, he said, "I don't know what might happen, but I think everyone is expecting something from the Dark Tiddler this spring. If he follows his pattern and comes here in some way or another, I want you guys to either lie low, or if you want to help defend, I know I won't turn down the help."

"Dark Tiddler?"

"Yeah, well, the more I get to know him, the less impressive he gets. So I thought I'd make the point that he's a small fish in a big pond the best way I could." He shrugged, but there was a smile on his face.

"I'll remember that. You've faced him, so you'd be in a position to know." She took a deep breath, and he had to admit that it was pleasant to watch. "I speak only for myself, but if the Dark Tiddler shows up," she said, interrupting herself with a slight giggle, "I'll at least fight at your back. I appreciate the chance."

"We're all affected, so why shouldn't you be able to fight? Hopefully we won't have to worry about it here, but we'd be glad to have you." He shook her hand and walked back to his table.

"I'm sure you would," Pansy said with a smirk, having heard Harry's last sentence. "Girl doesn't use or need a bra, damn her."

He let his eyes twinkle at her. "I think it's much more fun to be with people who wear them. It's like a present, and it's so much fun doing the unwrapping. And it's the gift that you can rewrap and reopen!" He took her hand and kissed it.

She blushed. "Damn it," she said with a mock scowl. "I'm supposed to be a Slytherin princess, and you've got me blushing like a Gryffindor virgin!"

"Is there such a thing?" Hermione quipped with sparkling eyes.
His week was also filled with practise. He was running simulations in the Room of Requirement, trying out various battle simulations - with Dementors, with giants, with werewolves and mixtures of them all - and trying to second guess how Riddle might act. It was not an easy task trying to predict the tactical choices of a psychopath with no regard for the lives of his own troops.

Thursday night he looked at his wives and said, "Enough. Tomorrow is our day of rest before all hell breaks loose on Saturday."

Friday morning found a tired but happy group entering the Great Hall for breakfast. Harry's eyes sparkled, because his wives had all chosen to wear their sexiest clothing underneath their robes. "We want you in the best possible mood when you fight Riddle tomorrow," Susan had said after returning his tonsils to him. She had then put on a pair of high-leg knickers (the ones he liked most) and the ribbed tank top that she so delightfully stretched (even more so now that she was pregnant), followed by her robes. "Maybe if I'm bad today, you'll spank me later?" she asked, eyes twinkling.

He had grinned back and said a very succinct, "No." He let the moment hold before he finished with, "If on the other hand you're good today..."

Her pout didn't last very long, being unable to hold in her laughter.

Harry was filling his plate for the second time, having been very distracted by his wives eating their breakfast sausages. The groans he heard in the background told him he was not the only one affected by their... unique method of devouring them.

He looked up in alarm as Severus grasped his left forearm and grimaced in pain as he looked to Harry and Albus. Harry was surprised when Albus looked at him next. He suddenly realised what the looks were for, and he said, "It's your choice, but my vote is no."

The rest of the school broke into excited whispers. They had no idea what was meant by the words, but it was clearly significant. They learned immediately as Harry said, "Is it safe to assume that you didn't expect this summons?" When Severus nodded, he said, "Okay. We need to lock down the owlery and this room right now while we figure out what to do."

Albus scowled in concentration for a moment before smiling. "Being Headmaster has its perks. The owlery is closed at the moment. What is your opinion by my new nickname for him." He turned to Severus. "I'd imagine he's calling you to mass everyone for the attack."

There were several gasps in the hall, and Harry shook his head. "Grow up. 'Chosen Jerk' here, remember?" he asked, and heard a snort of amusement from Severus, not to mention a few others. "I'm the guy the Dark Tiddler is after, remember? If I trust Professor Snape at my back, knowing that he made a particularly bad mistake all those years ago, I think you guys should trust him, too." He shook his head and walked to Dumbledore.

Softly he said, "I need to get to Godric's Hollow with a bag that can hold an awful lot of stuff. I still think that we can use the explosives to deal with at least his army, if not him."

"Yes, and since you left them in the Hollow?" Albus said.

"Exactly. If you can manage the Portkey and the bag for me, I should take no more than thirty minutes." He paused. "This could be a trap, but I don't think so. That would show far more planning than the little git has ever shown since he came back. I think he's planning to assault Hogwarts to get your book."

When Albus nodded, Harry turned to the Great Hall and said, "I need you all to follow the instructions of Pansy, Hermione, Susan, Luna and Professors Snape and Dumbledore. They have worked with me the most in the planning of this final battle. The other teachers should be listened to as well, but those six people have the best idea of how to get you through this alive. I need to deal with something before I can finish this whole mess once and for all time, and we can get on with the business of living." He was answered with a cheer from the students.

The group became all business as the Potions teacher stood and joined Harry's wives, while Harry and the Headmaster left via a side door. He quickly found himself in the Headmaster's office, which he knew to be a fair walk away and on a separate floor. "So that's how you get places so quickly," Harry said with a small laugh.

"Please do not let that secret out," was the reply as Dumbledore searched the room for various things, pulling out small silver devices that made noises as if surprised when they were placed upon the desk, as if they hadn't seen daylight in years. Finally, he reached into a 'secret' compartment in the middle drawer and pulled out a large military rucksack. "This should serve our purposes admirably. I shall cast the spells to make it hold several tonnes, if you would be so kind as to choose something to serve as a reusable Portkey."

Harry looked around the room for a moment before chuckling and pulling off his belt. The Headmaster laughed. "Perfect. No possibility of losing it. This sack should hold every one of the explosives without much weight at all." A few moments later, Harry was putting his belt back on. "Tap the belt with your wand and say 'Home' to get to Godric's Hollow. Saying 'Hogwarts' will put you in the Great Hall. He paused for a moment. "I shall endeavour to contact the Order and see just how many we can get for defence."
Don't forget Aunt Amelia," Harry added. "She should be able to bring us a few Aurors." Albus nodded, and Harry tapped the belt and said, "Home".

The tug behind his navel threw him to Wales, and he staggered as he landed. He opened the sack and then concentrated on the placement of every explosive on the grounds. "Accio bombs!" he said forcefully, and felt a rumbling shoot through the earth before things began rocketing toward him. He held the mouth of the sack open to try to catch as many as possible as fast as he could - the less time he spent picking up strays, the better off he would be.

They streamed in at a surprising pace - surprising in that it was neither too fast or too slow for him and slowed down at the very last moment to prevent jarring themselves or their new neighbors. He held the mouth of the bag open and they entered as if the purpose of the spell had been to bring them single file to him. He wasn't going to complain about it if it made his job easier.

It was as the last of them were entering the bag that someone approached him. He turned to face Pansy's mother, wand out and ready to take down whoever was behind him. "I take it that Riddle changed your plans?" she asked. She sounded calm, but there was some fear evident in her demeanour.

"Looks like it. We think he's going to attack Hogwarts, so I want these things to be used. We can repair the grounds easily enough." After a momentary pause, he hugged her and said, "I hate to go, but I have a battle to fight. We'll see you later today. I promise." He looked her squarely in the eyes, telling her wordlessly that he had every intention of keeping that promise.

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Half an hour later he and the others were experiencing the worst part of any battle - the wait. Professor Snape seemed to be returning to his snarky and ill-tempered old self, but the way that he was clutching his left arm, Harry had a sneaking suspicion that it was the pain talking. He found himself worried about the possibility of the death of Voldemort taking all the Death Eaters with him.

Actually, he finally thought, that's not very likely, nowthat I give it some real thought. I can't see him tying everyone to him back then, because he honestly thinks he can't be defeated. Using it as a power drain is also unlikely, because those tend to work both ways, and I can't see him letting others drain him - that way lies being overthrown by one of his own minions. So the Dark Marks are likely just a method to communicate to his followers some simple messages and a way of reminding them who's boss. He looked to the man that he was beginning to think of as a friend. I just hope I'm not brilliantly wrong.

People were milling around the areas that they had been assigned to. Fourth year students were protecting the younger years with some teachers overseeing the group. Fifth year and above were scattered throughout the castle at various vantage points. Harry and his wives were all centred in the Astronomy Tower, awaiting Harry's instructions. They all wore their armour, and the girls were amused by the feelings leaking through the link.

"Do you every think about anything but sex, Harry?" Susan asked with some humour.

"I have the four sexiest witches I've ever known as my wives. How can I think about anything else?" he laughed in response before wincing and bringing one hand up to his forehead. "Ow. I haven't felt that in ages. He must be in a real state." Harry thought for a moment. "Ladies? I need you. I want you to try to shield me while I see if I can get into his head. Any hints about his movements or plans would be a blessing."

They nodded and immediately surrounded him. As he closed his eyes, he saw the silver flare of their bond connecting the rings they wore. Smiling, he sank into his own mind …

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"… more careful, you idiot!" he hissed. "Just because they don't know doesn't mean they can't detect us if you do something stupid!"

"My apologies, Master," Wormtail whinged.

Harry shook his head at the actions of his bumbling servant. Good help was so hard to find.

The group of Death Eaters entered an underground room that both Voldemort and Harry recognized immediately. One by one, they rounded a corner and came into the Chamber of Secrets.

As they traveled, Lucius Malfoy requested, "With your permission, my Lord, I would ask for a few moments with the Potter brat before you deal with him."

"We shall see," Harry said, "But I see no current problems with allowing you to express your displeasure."

"Thank you, my Lord."

At Malfoy's last words, they came into sight of the Basilisk corpse. Harry jerked to a stop in surprise. "What in the name of Magic happened to him?"

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Harry pulled free of the fetid cesspool that was Tom Riddle's mind and shook his head. "We have a problem," he said. "There is a large group of Death Eaters and such coming to the school, but he has a small group sneaking into the school through another route. I watched them getting into the Chamber of Secrets."
Albus's skin decided to match his beard colour - white. "How many did he have with him?"

"No more than twelve, if the underlying thoughts were correct, and at least two of them are Lucius and Wormtail. He'll likely have Narcissa with him, but I don't know if the whole Malfoy crowd is there." He grinned a nasty grin and said, "At least Bella's not around to make things worse."

He looked out over the grounds. "Okay. I'll leave almost all of the explosives with you. I can't drop them into the Chamber because I'd bring the school down if I blew them all down there. A few should at least discommode them, however. The rest should be lobbed at the incoming army and detonated with a sharp blow, such as a Bludgeoning spell. Get everyone with good aim here to work on that - some to Banish at targets, and some to Bludgeon them. They're all impregnated with silver, in case there are werewolves in the attack force."

Albus looked at Harry, nonplussed. "You know that I need to remain here to help set off your explosive devices."

Harry looked at him for a long moment. "You honestly think you'll be safer out here? You'll have the bulk of his army to contend with." He paused for a long moment. "Do you have any idea how terrified I am that I'll come back from defeating the Dark Tiddler and be told, 'He died a good death'? I want you there to spoil my children, and you..." Harry gulped down a knot of emotion "... you have as much chance of dying out here as I do down there."

Albus smiled sadly in response. "We both wish to keep the other safe from harm in a situation where safety is an illusion."

"Stay safe, Grandfather," Harry said thickly as he hugged the man who had been his mentor, and occasionally his foil.

"And you, Harry."

Harry turned to the bag containing the explosives before his vision could blur completely. He pulled out ten blocks of explosive and handed two each to his wives, picking up the last two for himself. "We'll be doing some damage to the Chamber, so keep those shields up, ladies." With that, he began to head toward Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom.

He hadn't gotten too far away when he was met by Ron and Ginny. "Mr. Potter?" she asked. "Might we be permitted to accompany you and protect not only your back, but the backs of your wives?"

He met her eyes, looking deep within her, before saying, "I have no problem with that. However, the final decision is theirs." Ginny simply nodded.

Hermione stared at her the longest, and Ginny unflinchingly met the look. Finally, Hermione said, "You have a second chance, Ginny. As Harry told you, we aren't friends again. Yet. The possibility is there for it, though. So you and Ron had better stay alive, so that we can get to know each other again."

Ginny's look did not change, but she snapped to attention and saluted, with only the hint of a smile to show that there was anything other than seriousness to her mien. Ron simply nodded, and the group headed toward the girls' bathroom.

As they entered the room, they were met by a familiar translucent form. "Oh, hello, Harry!" she giggled at him. "It's been so long since you visited me last."

"I'm sorry about that," he said honestly. "I've been working toward ending the conflict with Voldemort. As a matter of fact, I've just now realised that you can help me with it."

"I can?" she asked, quite obviously startled. "How?"

"Would you be willing to slip down that tube that Ron and I slid down five years ago? Riddle and his sycophants are down there trying to sneak into the school. I want him stopped. Actually, we NEED him stopped. That's why we're here."

"I remember Tom. He was such a handsome boy," she sighed. "Like you." She finished with another giggle.

"Thank you," he replied with a soft blush. "The problem is, he's also the one who was controlling that beast that killed you. Tom Riddle is the reason you haunt this bathroom, rather than living on and becoming the beautiful woman I know that you would have become." He paused. "You'd have been the grandmother that all the boys would have talked about in my year, about how beautiful you were. Tom took that all away from you."

"He did, didn't he?" she asked, a tone of harshness coming to her voice. "What do you need me to do, Harry?" The tone reminded everyone listening that there were, in fact, things that a ghost could do to a living person.

"Slip down there and spy on him. See how many there are, and if they're carrying anything odd. Don't be seen if you can avoid it, because he may have spells to control or destroy ghosts."

She seemed startled again. "You care whether I... why?"

"I haven't been a good friend to you, but I care. And to be destroyed eternally? The only one I wish that on is the one who caused your death. I promise you this, Myrtle - when I succeed at destroying Voldemort, I will let the world know that you were an invaluable help to us. The world will remember that Myrtle Mulaney was one of the heroes."

"You bothered to learn my last name..." she whispered before drawing herself to full height and taking on an air of pride that they'd never seen in her before. She shot to the sink and disappeared through it.

"You make me proud to be your wife," Susan said thickly. "That was a beautiful thing you just did."
He shrugged. "What? Treat her like a human being, even though she's a ghost?"

"Most forget that we still are here and have feelings," said another soft, female voice. He turned to see the Grey Lady beside him. He couldn't recall ever having heard her speak in his presence before, and from Luna's reaction, she had never heard the Ravenclaw ghost speak either. "I - we - thank you for the kindness. What may we do to help you in your conflict?"

"I'm not sure. Too many in the Chamber will tip him off. Perhaps those willing to deal with some danger might quickly scout the Chamber to locate the exits? If nothing else, knowing how he entered would be good. I believe they came from around the statue of Slytherin, but I don't know any more than that."

"Then it shall be done," she responded. "If this is in fact the choke point you believe it to be, then you are well prepared for them. We shall return shortly." Harry looked around and realised that she had brought the ghosts of the other three Houses. With a short nod, they began to sink through the floor.

"Again with the waiting game," Hermione muttered darkly. "I hate waiting."

"I know," Pansy replied with a smirk, drawing a blush to Hermione's cheeks.

"Must everything be about sex?" Hermione asked, trying to cover her face.

"Yes!" Susan and Luna laughed.

Myrtle popped back through the floor. "He appears to be heading for this bathroom, since he is having his people clear the rock fall down there. I don't know how they'll ascend, though. The tunnel isn't exactly built for climbing up."

"He'll figure something out," Harry responded. "How long do you think we have before he gets through?"

"At the pace they seem to be moving, I'd guess about twenty to thirty minutes," Myrtle said.

"Excellent." Harry's eyes gleamed. "I want to give them a little surprise. Pansy, I need you to get my Firebolt. While you're doing that, we'll be preparing a surprise for Tommy."

"I've always enjoyed riding your broomstick, Harry," she purred. She then looked at what was being done and hazarded a guess, "Can I assume that you're making a particularly nasty doormat for our guests?"

"Modern art," Ginny said with a ghost of a smile. "They think he'll get a real bang out of it." Everyone looked at her for a moment, and no one was sure where it started, but someone snorted their laughter. Soon they were wiping their eyes as they worked, trying to stay on task while they laughed. The tone of mild hysteria was completely understandable.

"The battle has definitely begun," Pansy said softly after everyone calmed back down. "I saw a dead giant leaning against one of the school's standing stones."

"Are you sure he was dead?" Ron asked, sounding a little worried.

"He was missing half his head," she answered him. "Pretty sure." Ron looked slightly green, but nodded his thanks to her. She smiled softly back.

Finally, Luna was finished with the intricate tapping she was doing, tying the plates to each other. "You'll need to set the Proximity Charm on the fives, Harry," she said. "The others are tied to each other as Hermione said, so layer them accordingly."

"I'll put them about ten feet apart. That should be enough space for everyone to be in the blast zone when the first goes off." He mounted the broom.
He headed to the lowest point he felt safe from being spotted and placed the plates labelled '1' on the walls across from each other, leaving them there with Sticking and Disillusionment Charms. He followed this pattern as he floated back up the hole, until he'd reached the spot for the plates labelled '5', still fifteen feet from the top of the tube. He stuck them to the wall and then cast a complicated spell to fire the Bludgeoning Hex when the Proximity Charm was activated. Needless to say, this last was done from outside the range that he set for the Proximity Charm. He finished it with a final Disillusionment Charm on them and slid back up and out of the hole, just in time to hear voices from behind him at the bottom. He couldn't hear what they were saying, but he knew that they'd broken through the rock slide.

He popped out of the hole and whispered "Away from the hole! They're at the bottom, so we also need to be quiet!" The group broke in half, with Ron landing with Luna and Hermione, while Ginny stood ready to protect Pansy and Susan. Harry landed and stood atop the hole for a moment, surprised to watch steps appear in the smooth surface of the tube. "Bastard," he whispered to himself admiringly. "Wish I'd thought of that as a kid."

"You're still a kid," Ron whispered with a small smile of his own, obviously not sure exactly how it might be taken.

Harry joined him on that side of the opened sink and answered him, "Am not, am not, am not!" with his own slight smile. That was what Ron needed, and Harry could see both relief and a fierce resolve on the male Weasley's face. Hermione was stifling a giggle at Harry's response.

They waited for an eternity of moments before five staccato bangs sounded as bit of stone and metal and apparently even some blood and bone shot from the tunnel accompanied by a short burst of flame. There was a long rumbling in the tunnel, and then an incoherent bellow of rage. When it became understandable, they heard, "When I find who did this, I shall not Crucio them nor strike them with a Killing Curse! That will be too quick a death for them; too kind! I shall roast them over a low flame! I shall draw and quarter them! I shall flay the very skin from their bodies!"

They remained silent in the bathroom, although it was difficult with Harry crouching and softly mimicking Voldemort's rant in a very mocking manner, complete with one hand held as if it wore a sock puppet pretending to speak Voldemort's words. Finally, when the sound from below had stopped, they prepared for Voldemort's rise into the bathroom, brushing the debris and dust from their clothing. Harry smiled and cast a wandless, wordless Cleaning Charm on the group, and then stood, waiting for those who had survived to arrive.

Shortly, a head appeared in the hole and stepped out carefully. Oddly, the individual made no effort to look to either side; they simply exited the tunnel, showing themselves to be a somewhat battered and bruised Narcissa, followed immediately by Voldemort. As soon as Voldemort was in the bathroom, Harry hissed, "Close," at the sink. The startlement at the unexpected movement and noise lasted for just a few moments, but that was all that was needed as the sink closed, catching Lucius Malfoy's head between the rapidly closing stones. There was an ugly squelching noise as those stones met, once again closing access to the Chamber. Bits of Lucius Malfoy's blood, bone and brains squirted from between the sinks. It had closed quickly enough that the pureblood barely had time to even grunt.

Harry felt his gorge rise but suppressed the reflex ruthlessly. He knew that this was it; the final confrontation. He'd managed to get Voldemort separated from the rest of his followers, as evidenced by the fact that only two were in the room and by the muffled detonations from outside.

"Potter, you manage to surprise me," came the high voice of Harry's ultimate opponent. "All these people you bring with you to sacrifice to me."

"Delusional much, Tommy?" he replied mockingly. "The group of us have taken out all of your elite crew except for Narcissa No-name there, and with Muggle technology, no less. I'd have thought that growing up in London during the War would have taught you how resourceful Muggles can be. I wouldn't do that, Narcissa," he finished, not turning his head from looking at Riddle. "I think you'll find that the six of them are more than able to deal with you while I finish off the Dark Tiddler here."

"Brave words," hissed Riddle. "All that they are doing is ensuring that I kill you slowly."

"You already threatened that in the tunnel, Tom. Didn't you yell that you'd give the person who did that intimate knowledge of what a flensing knife is for? I placed those charges in the tunnel, you wanker."

There were three staccato bangs in the room, and it took all Harry had not to turn and look. He did allow Pansy to feed him the image however. Narcissa had taken great offence at everything that Harry had been calling Riddle and had apparently tried something. Ron and Ginny had been ready for this and had fired something that left her bleeding and unconscious on the floor, with an ugly mauve pallor to her skin.

"Looks like it's down to you and us, Tommy," Harry said. "That wound of Narcissa's looks like it will be fatal if it's not treated soon."

"Then I shall meet you another day," was the hissed response as Riddle reached into his robes. An instant later, confusion covered his face,

"I wouldn't do that, Narcissa," he finished, not turning his head from looking at Riddle. "I think you'll..."
Headmaster Albus Dumbledore stood on the ramparts of Hogwarts, awaiting the arrival of Voldemort's armies. He couldn't consider it a single army, simply because he knew that trying to get werewolves, giants, humans and Dementors working as a cohesive unit would be impossible.

He spoke to the students and teachers that he felt most secure in working with the materials that Harry had left him and split the blocks of clay-like material as evenly as he could amongst them. "Remember to aim them at the most dangerous of the opponents, such as the giants. A warning to those of you that are likely not mentally prepared - this is going to be a dangerous and bloody battle. Many will die at our hands, which is regrettable, but those we fight today choose to fight on the side of an evil man. Mourn the need for their deaths, but do not be afraid to take their lives if necessary." He shook his head and gazed out over the ramparts again before continuing. "Years from now, we will look back on this day with some sadness and with great pride at what we have done here."

As he finished, movement was seen in the forest. From the fact that trees were moving, it was safe to assume that the giants were part of the forces that Voldemort had amassed for the attack. They burst from the forest in a lumbering run, headed toward the school.

They thundered across the lawn, the rest of the army appearing behind them. As they approached, people began Banishing the blocks of explosive that they had been given at the giants. They all received a surprise as the watched a giant swat at the small block, successfully hitting it. When the smoke cleared, the behemoth was looking stupidly at where its hand and part of its arm had been.

The other people doing the Banishing were discovering that simply allowing the explosive to hit any target made it explode, so some began dropping them in the midst of the rest of the army. This was decimating them - literally. One wonders about a society that had a word for 'killing one in ten', Albus thought absently as he watched three giants topple simultaneously.

This was not to say that the fighting was one-sided. Those with wands in the approaching mass of people were firing at the school, specifically those lobbing the explosives, and the giants were picking up and throwing what they could at the school - much to the detriment of several of the werewolves in the army. The others quickly moved out of arm's reach of the giants.

Spells and giant attacks blew chunks of masonry away from the school, and students were downed by flying spells and shrapnel. Albus could only pray that they were merely wounded and not dead.

As the explosions continued, he began to note an interesting thing - retreat, at least from the human contingent of the attacking army. There were a number of them who had apparently decided that it was no fun attacking those who fought back and that the possibility of facing a Cruciatus from Voldemort was preferable to dying.

In short order, there were no living giants, and a number of the other creatures had been badly injured or killed. A muffled explosion blew out a window on the second floor as he prepared to send out people to check on the state of the wounded.

He shook his head as he watched the Auror team that was supposed to be accompanying them to Godric's Hollow arrive on the scene. Their state of utter confusion at the scene would have been amusing under other circumstances.

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The battle in Myrtle's bathroom continued. While they had Riddle massively outnumbered, he was far greater in skill and power. They were parrying almost all of his spells, with the occasional curse getting through and cutting or bruising one of them, but they were fighting him to a standstill.

Harry scowled as he studied the situation. Coming to a decision, he motioned that he was dropping back for a moment. He had realised the only method that stood a chance was a purely physical attack, so he decided to conjure what he needed. He needed his wives to keep Voldemort busy, though, while he worked.

He worried a little, though, because Ron and Ginny were getting a little reckless in their fighting. He was happy that a decent number of students had been given the dragon-skin armours, including them, but being reckless was going to kill them anyway. Please, stay alive, you two, he thought. We can't repair anything if you go and die on me. He shook his head to clear it. Wool-gathering is not going to win this battle, dammit! He thought for a moment before conjuring exactly what he needed.

Hermione had kept the weapons she had 'acquired' for as long as possible. In fact Harry was fairly certain that they were all still somewhere in the castle, but he didn't know where. They had all learned how to break them down and clean them, to the point where Harry knew how each of them was built.

He grinned and concentrated, conjuring a Barrett rifle, complete with tripod. He pulled the magazine and found it empty, which didn't surprise him - he hadn't been thinking of bullets at the time. Hermione had even come through there, by studying and performing hands on work. They had disassembled several of the rounds and had taken very careful measurements on the off chance that they were ever going to need bullets in a hurry. Harry slowly made three of them, just in case he missed.

He was exhausted, but he couldn't take the time to recover. As he set up the Barrett, he heard the high pitched shout of "Avada Kedavra!" A sickly green beam lanced out and struck Susan in the stomach, followed by maniacal laughter.

That laughter stopped the moment that Susan responded with "That hurt, damn you! I'll thank you not to go punching me in the stomach anymore!" This was followed with a bright silver beam of some curse that a very startled Voldemort only barely avoided.

Voldemort's attack redoubled then. "You know the secret to surviving the Killing Curse! I will have it if I must rip it from your meagre minds!" The silver shield arose again on his arm. "Crucio!" The beam hit Ginny, who began to scream.
That was all that Harry needed. He got behind the Barrett and concentrated. He knew Voldemort's patterns somewhat, so he moved the rifle slightly to the right of the centre of the shield and gently squeezed the trigger. The impact of the heavy bullet shattered the silver shield instantly, sounding as if Harry had just simultaneously destroyed ten thousand pieces of fine china and stemware. Voldemort stood there in shock, staring at the black fluid flowing from his ruined left arm. As he turned to look at Harry, his eyes widened as he saw Harry squeeze the trigger once more.

That was the last thing Tom Marvolo Riddle, also known as the Dark Lord Voldemort, ever saw.

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Dumbledore literally skidded to a stop in the doorway of the bathroom, stunned to see Harry kneeling on the floor with Ginny's head in his lap. She was shaking occasionally, quite uncontrollably, the way that many victims of the Cruciat did. Narcissa No-name was at his feet, still alive, so he quickly cast a stasis spell to keep her both alive and under control. Something oozed from between the sinks, and Albus decided that he'd rather not think about it at the moment. Myrtle knelt next to both Harry and Ginny, obviously worried for Ginny's welfare.

Last, but certainly not least, he spied a body that could only have been the one that Riddle had built for himself in the dark ritual after the third task of the Tri-Wizard tournament. It was missing most of an arm, however, and he assumed that the red smear against the far wall was what was left of the Dark Lord's head.

Harry stood and picked Ginny up, holding her carefully as she spasmed. "Let's get her to the Hospital Wing," he said softly as he began to walk.

The others fell in behind him, Hermione almost absently Vanishing the large rifle that Harry had created. Ron brought up the rear.

Harry stopped and turned to Myrtle. "You're welcome to come as well, Myrtle. We'd never have been as prepared as we were without you, and I can never repay you for that. It's because of you that all seven of us are still alive."

The ghost looked proudly at Harry for a moment before an expression of wonder replaced her pride. "I'd love to join you, Harry, but I seem to have somewhere else to be now," she said as she slowly began to fade. "Remember me."

"We will, Myrtle," Pansy said. "You're the hero here. She had tears in her eyes as she watched the girl that had haunted the second floor girls' bathroom for decades fade forever from Hogwarts.

"It seems that vanquishing Tom and being thought fondly of was what she needed to go on to the next great adventure," Albus said softly, tears in his own eyes. "She will be missed, but I am happy for her."

"We all shall miss her," the Grey Lady said as she faded through a wall. "But we are glad that she has had the chance to move on. She was profoundly unhappy here, while the rest of us enjoy our time in Hogwarts." She bowed low before Harry, floating backwards as she did, since Harry was now moving again toward the school's infirmary. "We thank you for helping her find the peace she needed."

He shrugged carefully. "She's human, too," he answered, as if it explained everything. Albus realised that, for Harry, it did.

"Good heavens!" Poppy Pomfrey exclaimed as Harry brought Ginny into her domain. "What happened to Miss Weasley?"

"Legillimency attack, I think," Harry said. "The Tiddler wasn't being gentle or subtle."

"He never is," Severus Snape said as he limped into the room, leaning on the shoulder of a smirking Kingsley Shacklebolt. "Don't even think it, Shacklebolt."

"Whatever are you talking about?" asked the black auror in a too-innocent voice.

"May we assume that the reason for the smirk is that Severus's injury is somewhat embarrassing in its cause?" Albus asked.

Severus scowled at the group for a moment before surprising them all by chuckling. "I suppose that it is somewhat amusing," he murmured. "I made it all the way through the battle, dodging flying masonry and helping Misters Creevey get as many photographs of the battle as they could - for Ministry identification purposes, mind you - and then I go and trip on a pebble on my way to see how Harry fared. After everything, I bloody well twisted my ankle."

Harry fought another hard battle, but he lost this one. He began to snort in laughter before releasing a full out belly laugh that had him falling to the floor and rolling, tears flowing from his eyes. Suddenly, his wives leapt from their places around Ginny's bed and ran to Harry, Hermione quickly Conjuring a wastebasket.

The necessity was obvious a moment later as Harry began to retch violently into the basket, sounding as if he was attempting to return not only everything he had ever eaten, but everything his parents and Sirius had ever eaten as well. They simply rubbed his back and held him as best they could.

"Oh my God, what am I?" he finally moaned. "Think of the murders I performed today. What am I?"

"A man protecting everyone and everything he loves," Albus answered. "We hold no blame upon you."

"You should," was the bitter reply. "It's bad enough that I spread Riddle's head along the back wall of Myrtle's bathroom, but I knowingly placed explosives ... I crushed Lucius Malfoy's head with a sink, for God's sake!"

"And you sorrow for the necessity," Luna said. "Do you think that any of the Malfoy clan would be thinking themselves dirt if they had done such a thing to you? Draco would simply be sorry that he was only able to do it once." She pulled him close. "Do you think I would have a child with the

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monster that you wish us to think you to be? Do you think any of us would bed a monster?” Her eyes twinkled. “Do you think I would let just any man tie me to a bed and have his wicked way with me?” There were snorts of laughter and a few exclamations of surprise from around the room. “That sounds like a good idea, by the way. When we’re done here, I think …” She paused for only a moment before saying, the tone of her voice matching her impish smile, “… I think that Susan needs to be spanked for the language that she used during the battle.”

Harry chuckled slightly, but it became louder as he heard Susan’s “Oh goddess, YES!” echo down the link. Hermione was first to lose her cool and start laughing, but soon all but Susan were laughing while the woman in question blushed furiously.

Harry shook his head and stood, more than a little shaky in his steps. "I'm sorry for the reaction, folks. It just caught up with me all at once."

"I was actually quite pleased to see it," Severus said as he met Harry's eyes. Harry smiled and nodded his understanding.

"If you all could kindly leave and let me continue working on Miss Weasley," Poppy said kindly but without looking away from her patient. "She will be all right, have no fear of that, but the quieter the room, the faster she'll heal."

With a final look at the hurt woman on the hospital bed, the group quietly exited the hospital wing.
Chapter 18

The bed was empty except for Pansy, which was fairly unusual. Harry assumed that it meant that it was later than he normally woke up. He lazily recalled that it was Saturday, three weeks since the final battle. He found a welcome sight in that it had gotten warm enough in the room that Pansy was now covered by only a thin silk sheet that conformed to her body shape. *What a shape to be conforming to,* he thought admiringly as his body decided to express its appreciation as well. He reached over and gently caressed her cheek, and she turned into it slightly, a smile beginning to grace her face.

He let his hand slide down her body, taking the sheet with him and exposing her beautiful breasts. He leaned over and took the closest one into his mouth and began to gentle tease and suck on the tip he felt stiffen against his tongue. Her breathing had sped up and each exhalation now contained a very quiet moan. His hand teased the other nipple with exquisite tenderness before he let his hand continue the slide lower, across her firm stomach, until he reached the triangle where her legs met. His fingers played with the hair gently, making her thrust upwards slightly.

He finally let a single finger slide further down, to the now rather wet slit, and toyed with her clitoris equally as gently as he had been teasing her nipples, making each breath a much louder moan. When he slid his finger just a bit lower, he smiled, and decided to wake her the best way.

He spread her legs - gently - and climbed atop her, sliding slowly inside her, drawing an extended satisfied sigh out of his apparently still sleeping wife, although he wasn't sure if she was really asleep or just playing. He picked up some speed, and somewhere along the line her eyes opened and her legs rose to lock at the ankles behind his back. When he noted her open eyes, he looked into them and tried to let her see all the love he felt for her. This was a bit much for her, and she spasmed around him. He could also hear several rather loud moans from the common area of their suite.

He continued to make love to her as she rode the wave of her orgasm ever higher. When he finally released inside her, he heard her and the other three scream joyously, "Now that…" she panted as he slowly settled atop her, still pulsing gently into her, "…is the right way to wake up in the morning!"

"I thought you'd like it," he murmured softly in her ear. "I know that I certainly did."

A short while later, Hermione walked into the room. "We have to stand before the Ministry and the public and make speeches, and you decide to do that to us," she moaned. "You know that we can feel it when you make love to one of the others."

"Are you saying that we should stop making love altogether?" Harry asked with an amused tone to his voice.

"Hell, no!" Hermione exclaimed. "Just … oh gods, you've made me hornier than usual, Harry. It's bad enough that I'm so horny because of the baby, but then you factor in my exhibitionism and the fact that I'm so worked up that I'm likely to be moaning while I give my speech, thanks to that wonderful session with Pansy just now."

"We need an orgy," Luna said announced, walking into the bedroom behind Hermione. "I think we can bring Hermione down to a dull roar if we try. Besides - it'll be fun!"

It took an extended, no-holds-barred shower session to bring Hermione to a manageable level.

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They met in the anteroom off of the Great Hall, where Albus spoke to them briefly. "I know how you are about all the pomp and circumstance, but under the circumstances, we cannot avoid it."

"Well, I can't say as it surprises me," Harry said. "We're all ecstatic that the bugger is gone for good, because it means we can get on with our lives. At least they waited until our N.E.W.T.s were done."

"And I can finally get pregnant," Pansy said. "I dropped the contraception last night," she added quietly.

Albus laughed brightly as Harry's eyes lit up. "It seems that Harry is looking forward to having small children around."

Harry grinned at the Headmaster as he said, "I enjoy the process of making them, too!" Albus simply laughed harder at the over-the-top expression on Harry's face.

"I will never be able to fully explain to you how good it is to see you happy, my boy," Albus finally said. "Especially after -"

"None of that," Harry interrupted. "You've apologised enough, and I've forgiven you. It's water under the bridge. Besides, if things were different, I might not have survived that battle with Tom, so I'm certainly not going to complain about that. The fact that I have four goddesses as wives is just icing on the cake that is my life." He blinked. "Was that as nauseating to you guys as it was to me?" he finished.

Luna giggled and opened her mouth to say something, but Hermione clamped her hand over the girl's mouth with a wry smile. "I think I know what you were going to say, and while it wouldn't embarrass you to say it in front of the Headmaster, it *would* embarrass me."

"I believe that is my cue to begin the festivities in the Great Hall. Someone shall come for you when it is time for you to come onstage. It should be approximately thirty minutes." With that, the Headmaster smiled and left the room.
"I'd rather come right here," Pansy said with a growl. "I think the three of you are bleeding your emotions through, because part of me really likes the raunchier version of 'coming onstage'." She moaned. "I don't usually get off on that, but the image of you proving to the world that I'm yours has my heart pounding, Harry."

He cast a series of charms on the room and then peeled her robes off her body, showing the simply blouse and skirt that she wore underneath. "How about here, then?" he asked, reaching up under her skirt and peeling her knickers down. Without hesitation, Pansy stepped out of them. He let his hands grip her hips under the skirt and pulled her close, pressing his erection against her. "That's what you do to me all by yourself, beautiful. I don't need anything else to make me want to possess your body." She moaned again and pressed back against him harder, but he pulled away and released her.

She turned to see why, and found him releasing his erection from his trousers. "Much easier to make love to you this way," he laughed softly as he let his hands slide up her legs again.

"No foreplay, Harry. I still haven't come down from everything we did in the shower. Just take me." He responded wordlessly by grabbing her bum tightly and lifting her while the others helped guide him in. As she groaned erotically at his delightful intrusion inside her, he turned and pressed her body against the wall and began to make love in earnest. She wrapped her legs around him and tightened the link down to just the two of them.

Their lips met as Harry's lovemaking remained maddeningly and delightfully slow. She whimpered as she tried to get him to pick up the speed, but he insisted on torturing her with the long slow thrusts that soon had her panting, a little cry coming with each exhalation.

Her legs suddenly tightened around his waist, and she started an erratic pumping against him as her orgasm crashed over her. Once it had begun, Harry grinned and finally sped up and began to thrust the way she had been begging him to, which soon had him joining her in a rather noisy orgasm.

"My God, I love you," he growled in her ear when he was capable of speech again, revelling in the momentary, pulsing reaction he got from her.

"And I love you," she whispered back, reluctantly releasing her death grip on his waist and putting her feet back on the floor and weakly accepting her knickers back. She noted absently that they'd been cleaned by one of her wives. She absently slid them into her pocket as she cast a few cleanliness charms on herself.

Just in time, apparently - someone knocked on the door, startling Harry, who quickly dropped the spells he'd put up. "Excuse me, but you're needed onstage in a moment," a woman in Auror robes said. As they approached her and readied themselves to go before the crowd, the woman said, "I don't know if anyone has said it to you, but thank you. Thank you to all of you."

"I simply did what was needed," Harry said as they continued out the door. "My wives are the ones who deserve the real thanks, since they didn't have to be there."

"You're welcome, ma'am," Susan said with a small smile. "Harry is very shy about accepting accolades for his good deeds. We were there just to make sure that he survived. He did all the hard work."

"Right," Harry answered in a mildly sarcastic tone. "I squeezed a trigger, and that was hard work, while you people traded spells with one of the most dangerous men in existence, which was nothing. You took a Killing Curse to the stomach, and I had the hard work?" He shuddered for just a moment. "I know the armour could withstand it, but you'll understand if my heart broke for just a split second, Susan."

She smiled and walked over to him. "And the baby is fine too, Harry," she said, putting his hand on her stomach. "Oh! Did you feel that?"

His eyes were wide with joy. "Yes! I felt the baby kick!" Impulsively, he knelt and kissed her stomach. "I love you, little one," he said softly.

He blushed several moments later as he heard a number of voices saying variations on "Aww," in sweet tones, and stood to realise that he had just done that before the entire assembly of students, parents and dignitaries.

Harry rose to his feet and walked to the stage, where there were several seats set aside. His wives quickly seated themselves, placing him in the middle. The Headmaster smiled and said, "We have finished the opening statements of this assembly, and now it is time to do what we came here for. Minister Fudge?"

Conelius Fudge walked to the podium and smiled widely. He was clearly in his element. Harry was amused, however, to hear Albus whisper, "Don't embellish, Cornelius. You will not like the results if you do." The Minister blinked once in surprise before looking at the audience and saying, "I could stand here and talk to you for a while about what happened, or I could simply perform the duty you're all here to see. I think that we'll all be happier if I take the second route, rather than make even more speeches up here." He laughed jovially to the crowd, which joined him.

I see why he's survived politics as long as he has, Harry mused to his wives. He felt their amused agreement flowing back at him.

"I don't think that anyone will be surprised that there are awards to be given out today," Fudge began. "Let me start with the award we will certainly be giving the most of today - the Bronze Staff for bravery." He began listing quite a few of Harry's fellow students, and not a few teachers, who were handed actual bronze staves. "The Silver Staff for Bravery is next." The list for those was significantly shorter - both Creeveys, Harry and his wives, Severus Snape and both Ron and Ginny.

"I can't accept this," Ginny whispered to Harry as she mounted the stage. "After what I did a year ago, I-"

"I know," Harry interrupted. "You would have earned this award no matter how things had gone last year. Your family has never been shy in the fight against evil. You've met Voldemort face to face twice and lived to tell the tale. If you don't deserve yours, then I don't deserve mine."
"Let's keep private things private," he said. "The important thing is that you entered a situation where you knew that you stood an excellent chance of dying. Are you saying that doesn't define bravery?"

"You really will refuse yours if I don't accept this, won't you?" she asked.

"Yes," was his simple reply.

"Well then, I suppose I'd best shut up and sit down, since you deserve yours," she said, walking back to her seat with the gleaming silver staff in her hand. Ron looked at Harry and nodded his understanding when his own name was called.

Luna and Hermione won the Paracelsus Award for Magical Scholarship for their work on the charm that could stop physical objects, while Susan and Pansy won it for their work on the dragon-skin armour. "We all worked on them," Pansy whispered, "but it really did break down the way that they say."

Fudge smiled. "Now we come to the point you all have been waiting for - the presentation of the Orders of Merlin. We start first with the Order of Merlin, Third Class. Will Misters Dennis and Colin Creevey come up here?" The two Gryffindor boys were stunned and actually needed their staves for a moment to stay on their feet. For once, they were the subject of all the photographs, and they blushed furiously. "Not only were their actions brave enough to earn them the Silver Staff, they helped the Wizarding World immensely by getting photographs of as many faces of the Death Eaters as they possibly could."

They were offered a chance to speak, and said nothing more than a soft, "Thank you," to the crowd.

Several other students receive Third Class medals, most of them from Hufflepuff, for doing medic duty in some of the worst parts of the ramparts and thereby saving the lives of several people. It was a shock to Harry to discover that they had actually managed to leave the conflict with no fatalities on the defender's side. There were several who had injuries that might take months to repair, but they were all alive to enjoy a post-Voldemort world.

Oddly, there were to be no Second Class Orders to be given - they skipped directly to the First Class Orders of Merlin. In fact, Harry was called to the podium. "Perhaps you would like to give these out?" Cornelius Fudge asked with a smile.

Harry scanned the list and grinned. "Yes, yes I think I would," he replied. Taking the list, he looked out at the audience and said, "I'm not going to give these in the order that they're listed here, because they're alphabetical, and that would be problematic. First up, in my opinion, should be Professor Severus Snape. Professor, would you come up here, please?"

As the stunned Potions Master began to trek forward from his spot near the wall, Harry said to the audience, "I can think of no person who deserves this award more than the professor. He has spent years in the most dangerous, unpaid job that existed in this world - a spy for the Light side within Voldemort's ranks. Yes, he wears a Dark Mark, but he can be credited with saving the lives of innumerable people because he was willing to subject himself to the presence of a madman who tossed around the Cruciatuss the same way that a child tosses off a Tickling Charm. I am proud to call this man my friend and am happier than I can say to see him receive this long over-due award." Harry began the applause as Severus accepted the medal and was pleased as he watched people throughout the audience rise to their feet to give him a standing ovation.

When the thunderous praise ended a few minutes later, he looked to the list again. "Again, throwing the list order out the window, I ask both Ronald and Ginevra Weasley to come up to receive their Orders of Merlin, First Class." Stunned, the two redheads didn't move at first but finally moved when Harry said with a grin, "Don't make me Accio you two!" The light laughter from the audience finally prodded the siblings into motion.

Once they were moving forward, Harry continued, "I'm sure you've all heard that there were problems between us this year. I can't deny it, unfortunately. What I do know is that these two were with Susan, Hermione, Pansy, Luna and me when we faced Voldemort. We trusted them at our backs. They fought like wildcats." They reached the stage and Harry looked to them directly. "I know that I can't avoid my own Order - I've been told that I want you two to know that I swore that I would not accept it if you two weren't granted Orders of Merlin for yourselves. You faced the scariest thing possible for you to face and triumphed." Applause tore through the audience once more, and he added softly to them alone, "And then later you faced Voldemort. Thanks for surviving, you two." He gave them each a gentle hug of congratulations before they turned to join Severus.

"I'm supposed to give out these next four one at a time, but that's not really applicable. They worked together like a well oiled machine, at times acting as if they were a single entity inhabiting four bodies. I couldn't begin to separate out each one for accolades." He turned to face his wives. "I call Susan Bones-Potter, Pansy Parkinson-Potter, Hermione Granger-Potter, and Luna Lovegood-Potter up here to receive their own Orders of Merlin from a grateful world and an especially grateful husband."

A gasp went through the crowd. "Yes. We didn't really hide it, but neither did we shout it from the rooftops for fear of what Riddle might do. But I will no longer hide that these four women give my life meaning."

"And at least three of us carry his children," Luna said softly in a voice that still managed to be heard throughout the hall.

"Before anyone asks," Susan said with a grin, "none of the children were conceived out of wedlock."

Harry snorted. "Wedlock always sounded like a punishment to me. Life with you is anything but."

"Oh no, they're getting sickeningly romantic again," Severus drawled from the corner of the stage.

"Hush, you," Harry laughed as his wives accepted their own Orders and joined the group, hugging each of them. He turned to the Minister. "I suppose it's time for my own?" he asked with some resignation.
"Exactly," Fudge said with a smile as he approached Harry and placed the medal around his neck. "Congratulations! Now, do you have any words for the audience that aren't in honour of your friends or fellow students?"

Harry laughed. "I'm always going to talk about how impressed I was with those who fought and worked to save the others out there. It was impressive, and I'm glad to know those students." He sobered slightly. "But I suppose you want to hear something else now, rather than a mutual admiration society meeting." Some laughter from the audience came about from that line.

"There's a lot I really want to say about this, but I'd have to say that … well, what I really want to say is that we probably would have had a very large death toll and you'd be living under the iron boot of Riddle at this moment if not for the help of a woman who had been dead for fifty years. The entry to the mythical Chamber of Secrets exists. Yes, the Chamber exists. And Riddle opened it fifty something years ago, to the detriment of one Myrtle Mulaney, who died when she caught sight of the monster of the Chamber."

"It was a basilisk, and you'll note the use of the past tense. It is now a dead basilisk, and has been for five years now. It was killed while I protected a first year student from the machinations of Lucius Malfoy." His gorge threatened to rise again as he thought about the elder Malfoy's death. "That's unimportant, though. The important thing to remember is the name of Myrtle Mulaney, a young woman who saved the school and the wizarding world, and deserves to be remembered for it. She was dead when she did it, and given Riddle's studies, still placed her immortal soul in danger to help us all. Please, above anyone else who received honours, remember Myrtle. She's gone now, passed to the great reward she truly deserves. But I promised her that I would try to see her remembered as the hero that she truly was. If I had my way, she'd be posthumously given the Order of Merlin First Class as well."

The room was silent in contemplation as he finished speaking, and he let them think for a while before surprising them with one more announcement. "I'm going on vacation for a while while this presentation is completed. My wives and I are going to disappear for a time and just enjoy life. I've spent my entire life being a target - either for tall, Dark, snake-y and now dead; for the Ministry; or even a target for the Daily Prophet and the general public. I remember some of those Howlers I received." He looked meaningfully into the audience, and one or two people had the grace to blush. "I just need to get away from it all for a while and be myself. So I will. Thank you." With that, Harry turned and walked to the others, and then quietly led them offstage to the anteroom.

Once inside he looked at them all. Four Potters, two Weasleys, and a Snape looked back at him with wide-ranging expressions."I needed to get away, and they needed to know that I'm disappearing. That island we talked about is definite," he said to his wives, "and I've even managed a pact with the goblins - they've seen how powerful I can be, and we agreed that if I needed it, they'd help me out. In return, I help them when they most need it."

He looked to Severus. "I was serious about that offer, Severus. If you want to have a place where you don't have to teach and where you can work on potions to your heart's content, you have it. It's a big island. It's where Sirius stayed at one point during his years on the run, and it's a Black family property that he left to me. The problem was finding it. I could conceivably make it a small wizard nation of its own. Your only real requirement would be to let me know if there was anything I could do to make you happy. Maybe make us some needed potions at times."

"Such an onus you lay upon me, Potter," was the drawn response. The slight curling of the lips let others know of the humour.

Ron shook his head. "If you'd have told me first year that you two would eventually become friends -"

"Do you suspect that I would have believed it either?" was Snape's response.

"You do know that Grandpa Albus is going to be insufferable now, with the two of us getting to a point where we don't want to murder each other?" Harry asked with a laugh.

"Isn't that a grandfather's right?" asked Albus as he entered the room. "Cornelius and the public are, to use an amusing expression, fit to be tied at the moment since they were hoping that you would remain available to endorse this product or that candidate. I believe that the Daily Prophet will turn on Fudge soon in order to keep their readership happy. Since they will not wish to accept any of the blame, they will lay it all upon Cornelius."

Harry shook his head, reached into his pocket and pulled out a conch sea-shell. "Their problems, not mine. Don't lose this shell, sir. This is a reusable Portkey to my - our island. I realise that you're likely to stay on as the Headmaster here, but know that you are welcome to drop by often."

"I hope it's a comfortable temperature on that island," Pansy said, obviously fishing for information.

"Luna can dress to her comfort all year long," Harry said with a grin and an over-the-top wink to the wife in question.

Ignoring the snickers and giggles running around the room, he looked to Ron and Ginny and then to his wives. The mental conversation was obvious. Turning back to them he reached into his pocket and removed two more sea-shells, these wide bowled and scalloped. "We can't get to be friends again if you don't have access to me. All the Portkeys I'm handing out at the moment are geared to drop you a safe distance away from the main house, and will set off a chime that can be heard by anyone on the island." He smiled. "Also, the goblins showed me a neat trick." He flipped the shell he had given Ginny over and set a very tiny fire in it, which immediately began glowing green. "Harry Potter," he said, and the fireplace in the anteroom flared. "You can call us if you want to visit and make sure we're not ... occupied." His voice was echoed from the fireplace. "It's designed to find the nearest fireplace or fire pit to the person you called. Thank Professor Flitwick and the goblins for that, by the way. The charm is set to the five of us at the moment - you won't be able to call Albus that way." He handed one more scalloped sea-shell to Severus. "Your choice as to whether, and if so, when." Severus nodded his understanding of Harry's verbal shorthand.

"As for us," he said, obviously setting himself to leave, "I think we'll get our things and be off. We will see you all later - we promise." With that, he pulled a nautilus shell from
his pocket and enlarged it. "Time for us to leave." His wives touched the shell, and they disappeared without a sound.